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THE SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS

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BY

THE VERY REV. FATHER J. B. PAGANI.

VOL. III.

JULY, AUGUST, SEPTEMBER.

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SCIENCE OF THE SAINTS.

JULY.

MILDNESS AND FIRMNESS.

"Wisdom reacheth from end to end mightily, and ordereth all things sweetly."—WISD. viii. 1.

FIRST DAY.

"Come to me, all you that labour, and are burdened, and I will refresh you. Take my yoke upon you, and learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart: and you shall find rest to your souls. For my yoke is sweet and my burden light." (a)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"The holy chrism used in the Church of God, by apostolic tradition, for confirmation and consecrations, is composed of oil of olives mingled with balm. These two ingredients represent the two favourite and much-beloved virtues of meekness and humility, which shone so brightly in the divine conduct of our Lord, and which He so forcibly recommended to us, as the most effectual means of devoting our hearts to His service and imitation, saying, '*Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart.*' Humility perfects us in our duties towards God, and meekness in those which we owe to our neighbour. Balm, which falls to the bottom of every liquid, represents humility: oil of olives, which always swims at the top, represents meekness, which surmounts all difficulties, and excels among the virtues as the flower of charity, which, according to St. Bernard, exists in perfection when it is not only patient, but also meek and mild."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THERE are three types in the Old Testament which may be particularly noticed, as foreshowing in an especial manner our Saviour's admirable

(a) Matt. xi. 28-30.

meekness. The first is that of Abel, who, when perfectly innocent, allowed himself to be slain by his brother, without offering resistance or uttering any complaint. The second is Isaac, who, like a meek lamb, followed his father to the summit of Mount Moria, and there obediently bent down his neck for sacrifice, although spotless and holy. The third is Moses, the leader and lawgiver of God's chosen people,—Moses, of whom the Scripture says, that "He was the meekest among men."

The prophecies, also, which relate to our blessed Saviour, exhibit and show forth in a particular manner His wonderful meekness: — "He was wounded for our iniquities," says the Prophet Isaias; "He was bruised for our sins: the chastisement for our peace was upon Him, and by His bruises we are healed. All we, like sheep, are gone astray, every one hath turned aside into his own way, and the Lord hath laid on Him the iniquity of us all. He was offered because it was His own will, and He opened not His mouth: He shall be led as a sheep to the slaughter, and shall be dumb as a lamb before his shearer, and He shall not open his mouth." (a) And in the fiftieth chapter, the Prophet thus makes our Saviour speak: "I have given my body to the strikers, and my cheeks to them that plucked them. I have not turned away my face from them that rebuked me, and spit upon me." (b) In a similar manner the Prophet Jeremiah makes our Saviour address His divine Father: "Thou, O Lord, hast shown me, and I have known: Thou hast shown me their doings, and I was as a meek lamb that is carried to be a victim." (c)

(a) Isaias liii. 5-7. (b) Id. l. 6. (c) Jer. xi. 18, 19.

The figure of a lamb, which is so expressive of meekness, is applied to Christ even more strikingly in the New Testament. The very first time that St. John Baptist saw Jesus, when He came to him beyond the Jordan, seized with the deepest feelings of admiration and reverence, he exclaimed, "Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world." (a) . . . The next day, again, John stood, and two of his disciples, and seeing Jesus walking, saith: "Behold the Lamb of God." (b) This title of Lamb is given by the Apostle St. John to Jesus in the Apocalypse as His ordinary and proper name. The Apostle St. Peter represents to us the Lord Jesus under the same figure of a meek and spotless lamb: "You were not redeemed," writes he to the first Christians, "with corruptible things as gold and silver; but with the precious blood of Christ as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled." (c) And in the second chapter he thus describes our Saviour's conduct under the ignominious and cruel treatment of his persecutors: "When He was reviled, He did not revile; when He suffered He threatened not, but delivered himself to him that judged Him unjustly." (d) And well did our Saviour show, both by His example and doctrine, that He was truly the meek, the spotless Lamb of God, that was destined to be immolated for our salvation. Run through in mind, O Christian soul, the whole life of Jesus; follow Him from the stable of Bethlehem to the summit of Calvary, from the crib to the Cross, and thou wilt be struck with astonishment at the spectacle of His gentleness and meekness under all circum-

(a) John i. 29.
(b) Ibid. i. 35, 36.
(c) 1 Epist. i. 18, 19.
(d) Ibid. ii. 23.

stances. As the innocent lamb is dumb before his shearer, and silent under the instrument which robs him, and as he allows himself to be despoiled of his wool without uttering a complaint; so did Jesus Christ yield His shoulders to the scourge; so did He bow His head to the thorns, and give His hands and feet to those who transfixed them with nails; so did He permit Himself to be stretched on the cross, without uttering one word of complaint. "Many dogs have encompassed me," says He, through the Prophet David; "the council of the malignant hath besieged me. They have pierced my hands and feet. They have numbered all my bones, and they have looked and stared upon me. They parted my garments among them, and upon my vesture they cast lots." (a) And in the thirty-seventh Psalm He says thus: "My friends and my neighbours have drawn near and stood against me, they that were near me stood afar off: they that sought my soul used violence, and they that sought evils to me spoke vain things, and studied deceits all the day long. But I was as a deaf man that heard not, and as a dumb man not opening his mouth. I became as a man that heareth not, and in whose mouth are no reproofs." (b)

Who can reflect, without feeling his heart moved to tenderness, on the answer which the sweet, the merciful, and amiable Jesus gave to His disciples James and John, when, transported by an indiscreet zeal against the Samaritans who had refused to receive their divine Master, they said to Him: "Lord, wilt thou that we command fire to come down from Heaven to consume them?" (c) The

(a) Ps. xxi. 17-19. (b) Ibid. xxxvii. 12-18.
(c) Luke ix. 54.

Evangelist remarks, that when Jesus heard this, "turning He rebuked them, saying: You know not of what spirit you are; the Son of Man came not to destroy souls but to save."(a) And who shall describe the gentleness with which He treated sinners? When the Pharisees brought to Him a woman taken in adultery, raging against her, and requested Him to condemn her, He was satisfied with admonishing her to sin no more, and suffered her to depart in peace. When he desired to convert the Samaritan woman, He first asked her, with the greatest sweetness, to give Him to drink; and then added with benignity: "Oh, if thou didst know the gift of God, and who is He that saith to thee, Give me to drink:" and then He revealed to her that He was the Messiah. And how did He behave towards St. Peter, after he had thrice denied Him? He did not remind him harshly of his sin, nor did He conceal himself from His erring disciple. He cast on him only one look, and that was enough to pierce him to the heart, and to cause him to weep bitterly. Even the perfidious Judas He admitted to eat at His own table; He washed his feet with His own hands; He warned him of the treachery he was about to commit; He gave him the affectionate appellation of friend, and even more, He kissed him whilst he was consummating the most horrible crime. But the most striking example of meekness was exhibited by Christ towards His cruel executioners, while suspended between Heaven and earth, and agonizing on the infamous gibbet of the cross. For how did He behave towards them? How did He revenge their cruelty? How did He treat those

(a) Luke ix. 55.

wretched men who dared to insult Him in His bitterest agony, wagging their heads and saying: "Vah, Thou that destroyest the temple of God, and in three days dost rebuild it: save thy own self: if Thou be the Son of God, come down from the cross." [a] . . . . Did He call upon His divine Father to send a legion of angels from Heaven to destroy them? O God, what a prodigious meekness! Christ Jesus, the Son of the living God, the spotless, the holy, the undefiled, the Lord of glory, nailed to the cross, overwhelmed with sorrow, and filled with reproaches, opens His dying lips and prays for His enemies: "Father, forgive them, for they know not what they do." [b] Who can comprehend the height, the depth, the length, and the breadth of meekness and charity which this prayer contains?

Let us, then, be meek and humble of heart, for it is especially by meekness and humility that we have to resemble our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ.

[a] Matt. xxvii. 40. [b] Luke xxiii. 34.

SECOND DAY.

"The virtue of meekness checks and subdues the passion of anger, by regulating it according to the dictates of right reason."—*St. Thomas Aquinas.*

"The meek are those whom the spirit of discord never agitates, nor anger perturbs, nor cruelty exasperates, nor rage inflames."—*St. Augustine.*

Such was the glorious St. Philip Neri. The following fact affords a striking proof of it. As soon as he began the custom of conferences and spiritual discourses in his own room, ill-natured persons opposed the practice in an underhand way. The chief of these was a physician, who incited two apostate monks, who lived in the house of St. Girolamo, to endeavour to drive Philip from it. These men had the care of the sacristy, and to create annoyance, sometimes when Philip went to say mass shut the door in his face; at other times they would not give him vestments, or gave him old torn ones, with insulting remarks. Sometimes they took the chalice and missal out of his hands, or hid them from him; at other times, when he was vested for the altar, they made him unvest, or when about to begin mass made him leave one altar and go to another, or return into the sacristy. With these and similar insults they tried to force him from St. Girolamo; and sometimes even went so far as rudely to push him. Philip did not allow himself to be in the least disturbed, praying for his persecutors with a continually increasing zeal, and behaving towards them with the greatest kindness and humility. He never lost an opportunity to serve or speak well of

them; indeed, when his own people begged him to leave that church and go to live elsewhere, he answered that he would not on any account fly from the cross which God sent him in that place. This patient endurance, far from subduing their ignorant insolence, only served to increase it; and the good father, seeing that his efforts availed nothing, had recourse with greater fervour than ever to God. One morning when he was saying mass, he fixed his eyes upon the crucifix, and said, "O my good Jesus, why dost Thou not hear me? So long and with such importunity I have asked patience of Thee, why hast Thou not heard me?" Immediately he heard an interior voice saying to him, "Dost thou not ask patience of Me? Well, I will give it thee; but my will is that thou shouldst gain it by this means." Thus strengthened, Philip endured every kind of injury which they offered him still more calmly and with greater contentment; so that the malignity of his persecutors was powerless before his patience. Indeed, he at last not only had no sensible repugnance to these insults, but even desired them; and when they ill-treated him, he either made no account of it, or else excused them. About two years afterwards, it happened that one of his persecutors met him at the door of the house, and immediately began to load him with opprobrious epithets, and to put himself into such a passion with him, that the other apostate, who was present, considering the great and long patience of Philip, was so completely overcome that he suddenly became his defender, and threw himself upon his companion with impetuosity, seizing him by the throat as if he would have strangled him, and would certainly have done him some injury if the saint had not prevented him.

Upon this, he who had just insulted him was also moved to compunction; and considering the great wrong which he had done the servant of God, and calling to mind the religious institute which he had left, took Philip into his confidence, and by his advice returned to his order, magnifying everywhere the meekness and sanctity of the holy father, and becoming his most devoted friend. Even the physician was at last overcome by Philip's moderation; and repenting of his fault, went to him, and in the presence of several others prostrated himself before him, and begged his pardon with great humility. He also became one of Philip's spiritual children, giving himself up entirely into his hands, and following him constantly.

The blessed mother St. Jane Frances de Chantal was another bright pattern of this virtue. Though on several occasions she was ill-treated by divers persons, she never showed the least sign of resentment; but returned good for evil, praying to God especially for those who injured her, obtaining graces and blessings for them, or recommending them to the notice of the royal family, with whom she possessed great influence: and however gross their conduct had been, the fervour of her charity was never diminished.

Of the holy Abbot David we read, that for the space of five-and-forty years which he spent in his monastery, he was never known to fall into a passion, or to show any sign of a disturbed temper, but in all his actions his eye always shone with cheerful joy and an unalterable tranquillity, as if he had been an angel dwelling amongst men; and yet he had many distracting troubles, being the superior of a hundred and fifty monks.

It is declared of the blessed S. Thomas of

Aquin, in the process for his canonization, that he was never known to be angry, or even at all put out of his way; but such was the cheerfulness and heavenly peace of his countenance, that all who conversed with him felt, from a single glance at him, interior consolation, and a certain mysterious joy of heart.

St. Remigius, foreseeing the approach of a great famine, had laid up a great store of corn, in order to distribute it to the poor; but some evil-minded people set the barn containing it on fire. On hearing this, Remigius immediately mounted his horse and went to the spot, hoping to check the evil; but finding that the matter was too far gone, and at the same time being chilled with the intensity of the cold, he merely dismounted, and with great tranquillity began to warm his hands at the fire, saying, "Well, fire is always a good thing;" giving an admirable example of perfect meekness under sudden events and among the most painful trials.

THIRD DAY.

"The fear of the Lord is wisdom and discipline; and that which is agreeable to Him is faith and meekness." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"The fruit of the Spirit is charity, joy, peace, patience, benignity, longanimity, mildness, faith, modesty, continency, chastity." (b) —*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"WHO is a wise man," asks the apostle St. James, "and endued with knowledge among you? Let him show, by a good conversation, his work in the meekness of wisdom; but if you have bitter zeal and contentions in your hearts, glory not, and be not liars against the truth; for this is not wisdom, descending from above, but earthly, sensual, devilish. For where envying and contention is, there is inconstancy and every evil work; but the wisdom that is from above, first indeed is chaste, then peaceable, modest, easy to be persuaded, consenting to the good, full of mercy and good fruits, without judging, without dissimulation. And the fruit of justice is sown in peace, to them that make peace." (c)

A certain brother having asked an ancient father to give him some direction, by the observance of which he might be saved, the father told him the best instruction he could give for the security of his soul was, to overcome himself so far as to bear the greatest injuries and reproaches with meekness and silence. Some of the brethren having extolled, in the hearing of St. Anthony, the virtues of

(a) Eccl. i. 34. (b) Gal. v. 22, 23.
(c) James iii. 13-18.

one of the monks, the saint put him to a trial, and found that he could not bear an injury; whereupon the man of God told him that he resembled a building which had a beautiful front, but which lay open behind to thieves and robbers.

The blessed Peter Claver, soon after his entrance into religion, made the following two maxims the invariable rule of his conduct:—I. When I am persecuted or spoken ill of, either I have deserved it, or I have not. If I have deserved it, why complain? I ought rather to correct myself and beg pardon of God for my fault. If I have not deserved it, I ought to rejoice and thank God for allowing me an opportunity of suffering something for His love, and for the rest I ought to keep silence. II. In the contradictions I meet with, why not do as the ass does? If he is abused or maltreated, he is silent. If forgotten or left without food, if made to work, if despised, if overladen, he is silent. In a word, whatsoever is said of or done to him he answers not, he complains not. Thus ought a true servant of God to act, and say to Him with David, "I am become as a beast of burden before Thee." By following these maxims, which he had learned from blessed Rodriguez, he was enabled to bear joyfully all kinds of reproaches, and to attain the virtue of meekness in a very high degree. For a long time he lived under a superior who was much prejudiced against him, and who, annoyed at what he saw extraordinary in him, judged it advisable to try him on every occasion, in order to be the more assured of his virtue; yet, carefully as he was then watched, not the slightest sign of bitterness or resentment could be detected. On one occasion, when opinions were divided on a certain point, a person present went so far as to call him an

ignorant fellow, who did not even know Latin, although his capacity on all matters of doctrine had been well proved: he said not another word, excepting to acknowledge his ignorance. To those who expressed surprise at his composure on that occasion he answered, "It matters little whether we are thought learned or ignorant; but it matters a good deal that we be humble and obedient." During holy week, perceiving a woman in the church of the college dressed in too worldly and indelicate a manner, his zeal was enkindled; so approaching her, he reminded her that such a costume was as unsuited to the season as it was to her age and condition. An apparent reproach on the score of age was quite enough to excite a vain woman's anger, and she burst into such a fury, that the father sacristan hastened to the spot, and seeing her agitation, immediately sided with her, and blamed Father Claver for his indiscretion. The rector of the college happened to arrive a moment later; and whether it were that he could not otherwise appease the angry lady, or that Father Claver's silence led him to suppose him in the wrong, certain it is, that he corrected him very severely, treating him as an imprudent person, who, without distinguishing the merits and qualifications of individuals, yielded to the impetuosity of his zeal. The humble religious, without saying a single word in his own defence, fell on his knees before his superior, kissed his feet, begged pardon for the scandal he had given, and asked for a penance. The consequence of this was, that the lady, astonished and confounded at all that had passed on her account, condemned her own folly, and resolved to lead a more edifying and Christian life; and even the rector could not help look-

ing with a more favourable eye on Father Claver's virtue.

It is related of the blessed Benedict Labré, that by the continual exercise of prayer, rigorous daily examinations, and his severe method of life, he had so completely subdued the passion of anger, and made it obedient to reason, that one of his confessors had no difficulty in speaking of him in the processes, as being like St. Bonaventure and St. Frances of Sales in affability and meekness. His countenance was always cheerful and serene, always the same. Injuries, contempt, blows, or ill-treatment never disturbed the serenity of his mind. His behaviour, under many unforeseen trials, is a clear proof of this. As a person of great piety was one day passing through the Piazza di Colonna Trajana, in Rome, he saw a number of young persons making game of Benedict, giving him blows, knocking his torn hat off his head, pulling his beard, and loading him with insults, whilst the servant of God stood "like a lamb before his shearers, not opening his mouth," and showed no resentment nor disturbance in his countenance. When he bent down to take up his hat, they all rushed upon him, and threw him on his face on the ground, loading him with scoffs, blows, and spittle. All this did not ruffle the tranquillity of Benedict; he received all without any sign of impatience, without uttering a word of complaint. This person, admiring Benedict's heroic virtue, conceived a high idea of his sanctity. On another occasion, whilst Benedict was journeying to the holy house of Loretto, he happened to hear some dissolute people outrage the honour of God by blasphemy and impure discourses; on which the holy man, being unable to quit the road which

they were taking with him, approached them, and in a mild and affable manner, and with a kind and placid countenance, sought to correct them, placing before their eyes the offence they were committing against God, and the injury they were doing to their own souls. These impious persons made a jest of his words as the reproof of a poor and ragged pilgrim, and began to load him with abuse; they called him a bigot, a hypocrite, and a simpleton; but the servant of God suffered in silence; at length they grew bolder, threw him down, and strove with one another which should load him most with kicks and blows. In the mean time, by the disposition of Divine Providence, some persons of consideration passed on horseback, and horrified by the outrage committed by these cruel men against Benedict, who made no resistance or complaint, they threatened them with chastisement, on which, being frightened, they left him and fled. On rising from the ground, Benedict, with a tranquil countenance, said to these gentlemen that they did not know how great a sinner he was, that he was deserving of a worse treatment, and that if they had known him, they would not have prevented these insults. These words, uttered with so much tranquillity and humility, greatly moved them; and two of those violent people who had so shamefully insulted the servant of God, repenting of what they had done, expressed with tears their sorrow for having ill-treated him.

FOURTH DAY.

"Thy power, O Lord, is not in a multitude, nor is Thy pleasure in the strength of horses, nor from the beginning have the proud been acceptable to Thee; but the prayer of the humble and the meek hath always pleased Thee." (a)—*Holy Judith.*

"Put ye on as the elect of God, holy and beloved, the bowels of mercy, benignity, humility, modesty, patience; bearing with one another, and forgiving one onother, if any have a complaint against another: even as the Lord hath forgiven you, so do you also." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

This apostle and great vessel of election urges often and most pressingly upon Christians the necessity of putting on the spirit of meekness, and of following mildness and benignity at all times. Writing to the Romans he says: "Bless them that persecute you; bless, and curse not. Rejoice with them that rejoice, weep with them that weep. Be of one mind one towards another. Mind not high things, but consent to the humble. Be not wise in your own conceits. Render to no man evil for evil. Provide good things not only in the sight of God, but also in the sight of men. If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men. Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved, but give place unto wrath, for it is written: *Revenge is mine; I will repay*, saith the Lord." (c) And writing to the Ephesians, he says, "I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called. With all humility and mildness,

(a) Judith ix. 16. (b) Coloss. iii. 12, 13.
(c) Rom. xii. 14-19.

with patience supporting one another in charity; careful to keep the unity of the spirit in the bond of peace."(a) .... "Let all bitterness, and anger, and indignation, and clamour, and blasphemy, be put away from you, with all malice. And be ye kind one to another, merciful, forgiving one another, even as God hath forgiven you in Christ."(b) Likewise writing to his disciple Timothy, he recommends him in an especial manner to practise charity, patience, and mildness. "Thou O man of God, fly these things, and pursue justice, godliness, faith, charity, patience, and mildness." Lastly, writing to Titus, he bids him to admonish the faithful, to be subject to every legitimate power; "to obey at a word, and to be ready to every good work; to speak evil of no man; not to be litigious, but gentle; showing all mildness towards all men."(c)

This spirit of perfect benignity and mildness, which the apostle recommends to all Christians, characterized in a particular manner the life and conduct of St. Francis of Sales. He, indeed, was a bright example of every virtue; but in gentleness and meekness, he attained to a degree of excellence quite singular and uncommon. His countenance was ever serene, upon his lips a lovely expression of graciousness ever beamed, and his whole face breathed such an air of sweetness as enchanted all who beheld him. And though, through the recollection of his soul, there was always a certain air of gravity upon it, yet, when he looked at any one, he assumed such a look of affection, that the very sight of him consoled and gained their hearts.

(a) Ephes. iv. 1-3. (b) Ibid. iv. 31, 32.
(c) Titus iii. 1, 2.

Moreover, his words, his demeanour, and all his actions were accompanied with a wonderful sweetness and mildness; so much so, that he seemed the very personification of this virtue, rather than a man possessed of it. Hence, he justly deserved the eulogium which the Holy Ghost heretofore bestowed upon Moses, that he was the meekest of men upon earth. So that St. Jane Frances de Chantal was heard to say, that she never knew a heart so meek, so sweet, so benignant, so gracious, and so affable as his; and St. Vincent of Paul declared that he was the mildest man he had ever known; and that the very first moment when he beheld him, he immediately remarked in the serenity of his countenance, and in his manner of conversation, a most exact image of the sweetness of our Lord Jesus Christ, such as enamoured his heart.

On one occasion, when St. Jane Frances of Chantal was treating with a lady on some business, the blessed father perceived that she was too tenacious of her own opinion, and told her that she was too stiff; she replied, "My lord, I cannot yield where justice is concerned, though it should be against myself; I must be firm." To which the blessed father rejoined, "My mother, you are more just than good; I do not wish you to be so just: you should be more good than just." These words made a deep impression on the worthy mother, who meditated on them for a long time, and practised them so well as to season her justice with such goodness, that in after years her deportment would have been rightly called only a just and amiable benignity.

The holy virgin St. Rose displayed a similar spirit of benignity and mildness under the severest trials and persecutions to which she was subjected.

Her mother, who was of a most austere and passionate temper, found fault with every thing she did; she condemned her reserve, she blamed her fasts, she did not like her taking up so much time in prayer, nor her retired life, so opposite to the maxims of the world; for these reasons she often scolded her, and went so far as to use a thousand abusive epithets, as if she had been an infamous person. At the least provocation she gave her blows on the cheek, and when she was carried away by anger, she put no bounds to her ill-usage; sometimes, not content with abusing her, striking her on the face, and kicking her, she took a thick, knotty stick, and struck her with it with all her strength.

The humiliations and sufferings occasioned by this ill-treatment of her mother were greatly increased by the harshness and severity of those with whom she lived, who all conspired against her, vexed because they saw her lead a life so different from theirs.

Under these persecutions Rose blessed God, and endured them with joy.

FIFTH DAY.

"Charity is patient, is kind." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Mildness and sweetness of disposition is a rarer virtue than chastity, and yet, without doubt, it is far more excellent, being the very essence of charity, which is then in its perfection, when it is not only patient, but kind. We ought, therefore, to have a great esteem for this virtue, and to labour hard to acquire it."
—*St. Francis of Sales.*

GREAT indeed was the esteem which that glorious saint had for this virtue, as his actions testify. An instance occurred on his publishing his "Introduction to a Devout Life," a most valuable work, full of heavenly wisdom, and highly appreciated in the church. A certain religious, belonging to one of the most austere orders, decried its merit, and went so far that he ascended the pulpit, and after declaiming against it, drew the book from his sleeve, and calling for a taper, burnt it publicly before the audience.

Francis being informed of the scornful manner in which his book had been treated, displayed a degree of meekness and humility almost without example. He said, quietly, as if the work of another had been concerned, that he wished he had received a direct statement of the objections; that as he had advanced nothing but on good authority, his opponent might probably have yielded to his reasons; or he himself might have adopted his reasoning; and say what one may, no writer had

(a) 1 Cor. xiii. 4.

ever satisfied the general taste of the world; that as the dispositions of men are so various, and their manner of judging so different, it was not possible a work should not excite some censure; that he had fully expected to meet with some opposition, and he was much more surprised only to meet with one angry critic, than if he had been assailed by a greater number.

At another time, a gentleman who had conceived for him the most virulent resentment, made every attempt to take his revenge; calumnies and the most atrocious accusations were employed for this odious purpose. But finding that he was unable to discompose such extraordinary patience, or excite the least degree of resentment, he determined to proceed to open outrage. For several successive nights, when every one was asleep, he came with dogs, horns, and all the equipage of the chase, to raise a frightful clamour before the episcopal house. The attendants of the holy prelate, indignant at such an aggression, and relying on the support of their neighbours, were desirous of going out to repel by force this unprovoked insolence; but the holy prelate so strictly forbade all active resistance, that no one durst disobey his orders. On this the aggressor took to the most injurious language; and the greatest asperity of abuse was also employed by his desperate followers. At length, on a signal from their leader, they loaded themselves with stones, and broke all the windows of the episcopal palace. The report of the outrage being spread, the friends of the holy prelate waited on him, and even the most moderate were of opinion that he should solicit redress from the senate and from his sovereign. Francis replied,

that he would by no means resort to that expedient; that such an application would ruin the unfortunate man; but that it was his intention to gain him. This answer was reported to the persecutor, and notwithstanding all his prejudices, he could not restrain his emotions. Some days after, the holy bishop met him in the street, and accosted him with as much politeness as if he had never been injured by him; he then requested the favour of his friendship, and embraced him with the same cordiality as if his conduct had been a subject of commendation, and not of complaint. The man, confused at a display of goodness almost without example, remained some time motionless, and unable to utter a word; but at length, overcome by that generosity which true sanctity alone can inspire, he asked his pardon, offered every kind of satisfaction he could desire, and was ever after his warmest friend and admirer.

Again, on a certain considerable legacy being left by a lady of quality to a religious house, a person interested in the transaction believed it to have been done by the advice of the holy prelate, and full of this thought called on Francis, reproached him in the most violent terms of abuse, and even lifted his hand to strike him.

The holy prelate, instead of discovering the least emotion, spoke with extreme mildness, and having demonstrated the mistake—he having given no advice in the matter—attended the man to the door. The impetuosity of this person was too violent to be suddenly calmed. Shame too frequently prevents a mistake being acknowledged, and the farther an error has been followed, so much the more difficult retractation becomes. A whole day passed without any change in the disposition of the

person in question; but on the following day, after seriously reflecting on his conduct, he went to the holy prelate, threw himself at his feet, and asked his pardon.

SIXTH DAY.

"My spirit is sweet above honey, and my inheritance above honey and the honeycomb." (*)—*The Wise Man.*

"The spirit of sweetness and gentleness is the spirit of God, as the spirit of mortification is the spirit of Jesus Christ crucified."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The saints, deeply penetrated by these truths, put no limit to the exercise of Christian meekness. Whilst the blessed Columba was superioress of a convent, two boarders, who had been received by the saint through pure charity, displeased with some regulations which she had made for the good of the rising community, contrived various calumnies against her. They endeavoured, through pretext of zeal, to insinuate themselves into weak and wicked minds, both within and without the convent, cunningly painting the innocent Columba in dark colours, as in a state of deplorable illusion. All the charitable offices exercised by Columba towards her confessor in his illness were taxed by them as suspicious symptoms of a secret understanding between them. They declared her won-

(*) Eccles. xxiv. 7.

derful abstinence from food to be false, accusing her of secretly taking food when supposed to be at prayer; and finally, said that her prophecies were the inventions or suggestions of her director. These accusations being formally drawn up with the greatest care that cunning envy could suggest, were sent to Rome, accompanied by a memorial for redress.

This storm had scarcely subsided when another arose still more violent. The princess of Spoleto, grievously offended because she could not induce Columba to come to Spoleto, joined the party of her adversaries, and became one of her bitterest persecutors. The efforts of this lady were so powerful, that orders were sent from Rome, by which Columba was deposed from the office of superioress, deprived of her ordinary confessor, and forbidden to have any communication with the fathers of her order under pain of censure.

When these orders from supreme authority were presented to Columba, like a meek lamb, silent under the sharp knife, she humbly bowed her head, and, with tears in her eyes, declared herself deserving of greater humiliation, as she was anxious only to preserve the grace and friendship of God. Persons were secretly sent to the innocent Columba, exhorting her to fly from the city to avoid persecution, and suggesting to her that in this case it was necessary to have recourse to Rome; that if she went to Rome, persons of influence would not be wanting to protect her, and that by remaining in Perugia, she would be continually derided as a foolish and deluded person. But none of these fierce storms of calumnies, contempt, scoffs, menaces, and punishment, were able to overcome Columba's constancy, or even alter the serenity of

her countenance, and though at this time she suffered from great pain in her teeth, which was habitual to her, she was never seen discomposed or disturbed. The heroic virgin remained as a rock in the midst of the waves, copying in herself her crucified Lord, who had been always the object of her affections. She had always on her lips her favourite psalm, "In conspectu angelorum psallam tibi;" and this, "In quocumquo die invocavero te, exaudi me, multiplicabis in anima mea virtutem."

A certain advocate of Annecy carried his hatred of St. Francis of Sales to a degree of frenzy, and omitted no opportunity of injuring him by calumnies, and every other method he could devise. His friends often reproved him for his conduct, showed him his error, and clearly predicted that some signal disaster would befal him. Some days after, meeting the holy prelate, he fired a pistol at him, and wounded an attendant near his person. He was instantly seized and conducted to prison, and, notwithstanding every effort on the part of the holy prelate to save him, was condemned to die. The charity of the saint was not satisfied; he obtained a respite for the criminal, and solicited his pardon with so much importunity of the duke of Savoy, that it was at length granted. Having obtained this favour, he went in person to the unfortunate man to convey the intelligence. But this great mildness was insufficient to soften his heart; he loaded the holy bishop with fresh abuse, and though the humble prelate condescended even to ask his pardon, the ill-fated man could not be induced to enter into himself. Nevertheless, the bishop gave him a full pardon, but, sorrowing over his obduracy of heart, he told him at parting: "I have rescued you from the justice of men, you will

fall into the hands of God, and then I shall not have the same influence." The event justified the prediction,—the justice of God overtook him, and he afterwards made an unhappy end. These and similar acts of clemency, however much commended in the Gospel, did not always meet with the approbation of the friends of the saint. Some reproached him with not sufficiently supporting the dignity of his character, and ventured to declare that his excessive mildness rendered him contemptible. But the holy bishop replied, that nothing was more becoming the character of a bishop than meekness and patience; that he was well aware the world and self-love had established very different maxims, but that the rule of the Gospel and the example of our Redeemer were ever opposed to such principles, and that he should always deem it his glory to follow his Master. To some he observed that he had laboured all his life to acquire a small stock of meekness, and he considered it a duty not to lose the labour of so many years in an hour; that God had reserved vengeance to Himself, and to us had left only the glory and advantage of pardoning.

SEVENTH DAY.

"There is nothing which so much aids to keep the soul in tranquillity and calm as meekness and modesty. For, should we externally enjoy great peace, if stormy thoughts, agitation, and sedition arise within, the external peace will be of no avail; we shall be like a miserable town, which, although well strengthened with ramparts and walls against attacks from without, contains and nourishes treacherous citizens within." (c) — *St. John Chrysostom.*

"Mildness is a virtue, in which principally consists nobility of soul. And for this reason it is that the lovers of the world often fail in mildness, because they are not possessed of that nobility, or only in a very scanty and imperfect degree. If they are not the first to use insulting and uncourteous terms, at least when they are thus attacked by others they resent it with the utmost indignation, giving in return language doubly abusive, and thus showing by their vengeance that they have an ignoble and clownish disposition. The servants of God, on the other hand, whether provoked by word or work, by keeping themselves tranquil and peaceful, evince a perfect nobleness of soul, superior to all rude and clownish feeling."—*St. Thomas of Aquin.*

That same angelical doctor confirmed by his conduct this his noble sentiment. Under whatever circumstances of provocation he found himself, he was never known to show signs of resentment; but at all times, and on all occasions, he evinced a heart superior to all the emotions of anger, and filled with the most blessed tranquillity.

We read the same of that great apostle of France, St. Vincent of Paul. He once shared a lodging-room with another person, who, having gone out early, forgot to shut a drawer in which he had placed his money. The saint, who was unwell,

(c) Homil. 34 in Genes. 13.

remained in bed until a later hour, and a man who brought to him some medicine, looking round for a glass, discovered the money and took it. The gentleman on his return, being surprised not to find the money, demanded it at once of Vincent. The servant of God, who had seen nothing of what had passed, answered that he had neither taken it nor seen it taken. This increased his companion's bad humour, and his anger knew no bounds. The silence and patience of the saint were proofs in his eyes that he was guilty. He broke off all intercourse with him, and decried him everywhere as a consummate villain. At a conjuncture so afflicting to a young priest, who must have at heart his good name, Vincent never lost his peace of mind. So black a calumny never altered his tranquillity. His constant reply was that He, who was one day to judge him, knew his innocence. During the course of this affair, which made a great noise, he preserved such a perfect equanimity, that good people, who watched him closely, esteemed more than ever his virtue, through the perfect control over his passions by which he possessed his soul in peace. He who admired him most of all, although much later, was the very gentleman who had treated him so cruelly. For the thief having been put in prison for some new crime, urged by remorse of conscience, which usually speaks loudest in time of affliction, accused himself of the theft which had been attributed to Vincent, and promised to make full restitution. The gentleman then felt the unworthiness of his conduct, and the liveliest horror for his hasty calumny. To allay his trouble, he besought the saint, in a long letter, to send him his pardon, protesting that, if he refused him, he would come in person to Paris, to throw himself at his

feet, and beg it of him with a rope about his neck. The holy priest spared him the expense and trouble of so humiliating a step. He who had pardoned him in his greatest excess, how could he refuse to do so now that he saw him give such striking proofs of sorrow and repentance?

Still more wonderful is what we read of the heroic meekness and perfect tranquillity of St. Joseph Calassanctius, under the most awful trials with which it pleased God to try his virtue. This saint, after labouring for many years for the welfare of the public, after having filled the Christian world with the fame of his sanctity, already spread through Spain, Italy, Germany, and other parts of Europe; after having restored the dead to life, given sight to the blind, freed those who were possessed with the devil, cured the sick of every sort of malady; after having multiplied food for the famishing, sanctified monasteries, hospitals, and prisons; after having frequently enjoyed the familiar visits of angels and saints, was, by God's permission, assailed by the blackest calumnies and sentenced to imprisonment. A troop of soldiers was despatched to the saint's residence, with orders to surround the house and the church; and about an hour before mid-day, the prelate who was charged with the execution of the sentence appeared, entered the sacristy, and commanded the presence of Calassanctius; the saint was then on his knees in prayer, having just celebrated mass. He promptly obeyed the summons of the assessor, who, without waiting for the accustomed civilities, thus accosted him: "You are the prisoner of the Holy Office!" Without a word of reply, Calassanctius was obedient to the command; nor did he so much as send for his cap, that he might not detain the assessor.

Preceded by two of his religious, he walked alone behind them, followed by the prelate in his coach, which closed the mournful procession. The accompanying circumstances contributed to increase the sufferings of the man of God. He was fasting from the morning of the previous day, at the advanced age of eighty-six; and thus he had to walk about mid-day beneath a burning sun, with his head uncovered, in the month of August, and surrounded by clamorous guards; he was also conducted by the longest path to the Piazza Pasquino, then through the frequented road of the Banchi, over the bridge of St. Angelo, to the Holy Office, accompanied all the way by crowds of people, collected by curiosity and surprise. Calassanctius himself was the chief object of observation. Many of the lower orders, who knew nothing of him or of his sanctity, and who had no notion even of the common laws of humanity, followed him, clapping their hands, shouting, and making other manifestations, usual only on the execution of some notorious criminal. On the road from St. Pantaleon to the Inquisition, Calassanctius submitted to this contumelious appearance in the midst of guards with constant meekness and joy, always serene, always tranquil: he owned to one of his confidential friends, that throughout the journey his sole occupation had been the meditation on his divine Redeemer, betrayed by his own disciple, and dragged about from one tribunal to another, together with acts of sweet gratitude for being allowed the opportunity of tasting some small share of His sufferings. Whilst waiting in the hall of the assessor, his composure of mind, seconded by weariness of limbs, afforded him the opportune relief of a refreshing sleep. As he was thus slumbering, one of the

officials of the Inquisition, and a young nobleman of high rank, stood gazing at him, when the latter exclaimed, "That is the face of a saint, and not of a criminal!"

When people went (as very many did), either to condole or congratulate with him, his countenance was ever smiling, and his heart cheerful. Only in one instance did Joseph express regret and affliction, and this was when, his innocence being discovered, he was conducted home, as it were, in triumph through the streets.

EIGHTH DAY.

"Many appear full of mildness and sweetness, as long as everything goes their own way; but the moment any contradiction or adversity arises, they are in a flame, and begin to rage like a burning mountain. Such people as these are like red-hot coals hidden under ashes. This is not the mildness which our Lord undertook to teach us in order to make us like unto himself. We ought to be like lilies in the midst of thorns, which, however they be pricked and pierced, never lose their sweet and gentle fragrance."—*St. Bernard.*

"Take care that you really cherish the mystical chrism of meekness and humility within you. It is a most successful artifice of the enemy, to deceive with only the exterior expressions and appearances of these two virtues, so as to make many persons believe themselves really meek and humble, while they have none of the interior dispositions either of meekness or humility. At the least cross word, or the slightest injury, such persons will swell with pride, and give themselves airs of unparalleled arrogance, notwithstanding their external show of these virtues. It is said that those who take the panacea, called the grace of St. Paul, swell not at all when bitten by the viper, provided the panacea be of good quality. In like manner, when our humility and meekness are good and genuine, they preserve us from the swellings and heat which injuries would otherwise cause in our hearts. But if, when bitten and stung by the tongues of enemies and detractors, we are roused, and vexed, and swell with anger, it is a true sign that our meekness and humility are not true and sincere, but only artificial and apparent."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint, in his entertainments with his spiritual daughters, the Nuns of the Visitation, thus speaks to them: "It is by no means wonderful that a religious, who has nothing to discompose and try her, should be distinguished by mildness or should commit few faults. When I am told, 'Look at such a religious, she is never observed to commit any imperfection,' I immediately ask, 'Has she any

employment?' If I receive an answer in the negative, I set very little value on her perfection. There is a wide difference between the virtue of such a one and that of another who is well tried, either interiorly by temptations, or exteriorly by the contradictions which she encounters; for the virtue of fortitude and the force of virtue are never acquired in the time of peace, and while we are not exposed to the contrary winds of temptation. Those who are reputed meek without experiencing contradictions, those who have not acquired this virtue sword in hand, may be exemplary, and give edification; but if you proceed to the proof, you will immediately see them agitated, and showing that their meekness is not solid and strong, but only apparent and imaginary."

This saint ruled his conduct by these maxims, and thus became a pattern of most perfect meekness. Of him we may say, that peace was found in the midst of war, and gentleness amid the most savage bitterness; so much so, that he himself had occasion one day to say, "For some time past the opposition and contradiction I have met with have been to me a source of the sweetest and most delicious peace, and a pledge that the time draws nigh when my soul will be confirmed in the grace of my good God, which happy moment is in good truth the only desire and ambition of my heart." On no occasion did the admirable peace and tranquillity of his mind shine forth with greater brightness than in the persecutions which he endured in behalf of the Order of the Visitation; and it must be remembered that that Order was the child of his own creation, and the work of his own hands; a work which had cost him many prayers, and labours, and sufferings; and was doubtless dear to

him as the pupil of his eye. So violent were the attacks made against this excellent institute, that more than once he beheld it on the point of utter extinction, and yet he never lost his peace of mind; he even wrote to a friend, that he thanked God for the calumnies that had been heaped upon his little congregation, for that they were one of the most certain signs of the approbation of heaven.

Of the same description was the meekness of the blessed Paul of the Cross. The first time that he went to Civitâ Vecchia, on entering the church one evening to pray, he was driven from it in a very insulting manner, with words as abusive as if he had been the vilest and most infamous man in the world; yet he never opened his mouth, but recollected in himself, with great humility left the church, recommending to our Lord those who thus insulted him. Another time, and in another town, he was loaded with abuse and greatly insulted. To such bad treatment the servant of God offered no answer, but with humility, patience, and sweetness, kneeling down at once before the person who insulted him, interiorly recommended him to God without saying a word in his own defence.

When he was advanced in years, a letter in angry and bitter language was written to him by a person who wrongly thought himself aggrieved by Father Paul. The servant of God, full of that charity which is discreet and mild, said cordially to his companion, "I compassionate him." But the meekness of the servant of God was never so clearly proved to be so great and heroic as at the time when he went to Rome to obtain the approbation of his rules. In a lonely street he met a certain religious, who had entirely lost the spirit of his vocation; this man, without having received

from the servant of God any provocation, began to ill-treat him most shamefully, and taking occasion from his admirable meekness to be more violent, threw him upon the ground, struck him unmercifully, and even went so far as to trample on him; through all which the venerable father did not show any sign of resentment, but bore all with the gentleness of a lamb.

The glorious St. Francis of Assissi, to show what kind of humility and meekness became his children in religion, once spoke thus to brother Leo: "Suppose we were to arrive at the convent of St. Mary of the Angels very wet, covered with mud, perishing with cold, nearly dead with hunger, and that the porter, instead of letting us in, were to leave us at the gate in this pitiable state, saying angrily, 'You are a couple of idle vagabonds, who stroll about the world and receive the alms which the real poor ought to get.' If we bear this treatment with patience, without being discomposed, and without murmuring; if we even think humbly and charitably that the porter knows us well for what we are, and that it is by God's leave that he behaves thus to us, mark this down as perfect joy.

"Suppose, moreover, that we continue to knock at the door, and that the porter, considering us importunate, should come out and give us some severe boxes on the ears, and say, 'Get along, scoundrels, go to the hospital, there is nothing for you to eat here.' If we bear all these things patiently, and we pardon him from our hearts, and with charity, note, this would be a subject for perfect joy.

"Let us, in fine, suppose that in this extremity the cold and hunger compel us to entreat, with

tears and cries, to be allowed to enter the convent, and that the porter, in great irritation, darts out with a stick full of knobs, takes us by the cowl, throws us down in the snow, and beats us till we are quite covered with bruises; if we bear all this ill-usage with joy, with the thought that we ought to participate in the sufferings of our blessed Saviour Jesus Christ, note this, and note it carefully, that this is, for a friar minor, the subject of a true and perfect joy."

NINTH DAY.

"Blessed are the meek, because they shall possess the land." (a) —*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"The meek shall inherit the land, and shall delight in abundance of peace." (b)—*The Holy Prophet David.*

We have already remarked that the virtue of meekness consists particularly in moderating and subduing the motions of anger according to the dictates of right reason and faith, forgiving the offences which are done us, without ever yielding to the desire of revenge, and loving our offenders. The meek, therefore, are those who keep a perfect control over their angry feelings and do not return evil for evil, but rather overcome evil by good. The virtue of meekness springs from poverty of

(a) Matt. v. 4. (b) Ps. xxxvi. 11.

spirit, for whoever is really poor in spirit, namely, perfectly detached with his heart from the honours, riches, and other vanities of this life, will not find it difficult to bear peacefully and meekly any injury which may be done to him.

Our Saviour says that the meek shall possess the land. By this we must not understand the wicked and cursed land now inhabited by frail mortal man, which of itself yields nothing but briars and thorns; but that land of which holy David says, "I believe to see the good things of the Lord in the land of the living;"(a) and again, "I cried to Thee, O Lord, I said, 'Thou art my hope, my portion in the land of the living.'"(b)

"Meekness," writes St. Basil, "the greatest of virtues, is reckoned amongst the beatitudes. *Blessed are the meek, because they shall possess the land.* For that blessed land, the heavenly Jerusalem, is not the spoil of warriors conquered, but the hoped inheritance of the meek, who patiently endure the evils of this life."(c)

"The meek," writes St. Augustine, "shall possess the land; that land of which we have spoken so often, namely, the heavenly Jerusalem, which shall be delivered from the present captivity, and will live eternally with God and in God."(d)

This land, which according to the words of Christ will be granted especially to the meek, may also be understood to signify the inhabitants of the earth, the men who are travelling upon earth. For the meek, notwithstanding all the contradictions which are raised against them, exercise such influence over the hearts of men, and by their vir-

(a) Ps. xxvi. 13.
(b) Ibid. cxli. 6.
(c) In Ps. xxxiii.
(d) Serm. in Ps. xxvi.

tue have such power in gaining their affections and reverence, that it is almost impossible not to love them, and not to do them all the good which is possible. The constancy of their love, their continual cheerfulness, their condescending to others in all lawful things, their cordial affection and respect for all, and their constant peace and tranquillity in the midst of injuries and sufferings, without giving way to resentment, without uttering a word of complaint, but ever returning good for evil, benediction for malediction; all this, I say, makes a sweet violence on the hearts of men, and forces them to revere and love them, and to subject themselves to them as to persons possessed of superior authority. This is truly to possess the land.

"Meekness," says St. John Climachus, "is the support of obedience, the guide of religious societies, the bridle of rage, the control of anger, the source of joy, the imitatrix of Christ, the property of the blessed in heaven, the check of the devil, the shield against bitterness and asperity of mind. The Lord rests in the hearts of the meek; but the soul of the violent is the rest of the devil. The meek shall possess the land, or rather shall dominate on the land; but the violent shall be exterminated."

This land which shall be granted in possession to the meek, may also be explained of the glorious body, made like to the body of the glory of Christ, which at the regeneration will be granted to the meek as their blessed inheritance. "The earth," says St. Hilary, "is promised for an inheritance to the meek, that is, the possession of that body which the Lord has taken up; for as on account of the meekness of our minds Christ dwells in us,

so we also shall be clothed with the glory of His glorified body." And St. Leo, in his sermon upon the Feast of All Saints, says, "The earth promised to the meek, and to be possessed by them, is the flesh of the saints which, through the merit of humility, will be changed by a happy resurrection, and clothed with the glory of immortality: hereafter it will never oppose the spirit, but will cheerfully maintain the agreement of perfect unity." And a little after, "The meek will possess the land in perfect peace, and their rights will never be lessened, since this corruptible will have put on incorruption, and this mortal will have put on immortality, that what was dangerous may be changed into a reward, and what was burdensome into an honour." It is especially at the consideration of this truth that the saints felt encouraged to pursue meekness with such perfection. It is related of St. Liguori, that he never resorted to severity but with the greatest pain, and only in cases of strict necessity. "You cannot imagine," he wrote to one of his penitents at Naples, "how much it costs me to treat certain persons with severity; and I think one succeeds better by gentleness than by violence." He was once seen to weep in giving a severe reprimand to a gentleman whose deplorable conduct had not yielded to repeated warnings. Brother Francis Anthony, who lived with the saint for fifty years, attests, that whether in relation with his brethren or with strangers, he constantly evinced unalterable sweetness and equanimity, however annoying that intercourse might sometimes be.

Once on a certain prebend becoming vacant, many candidates came to Alphonsus, and asked his recommendation at the Court of Rome, in which

the nomination was vested. Amongst the rest, a gentleman presented himself to ask support for one of his brothers. While all the candidates were trying to be favoured at Rome, the prebend was conferred on an old priest who had thought least about it. The result of this was, that the gentleman persuaded himself that the bishop had secretly recommended the old priest, and believing that he had been trifled with, gave vent to the most vehement expressions of anger; he insulted his lordship and loaded him with abuse. When Alphonsus heard it, he said, "You wish to punish me, I have not deserved it; but I accept it for the love of Jesus Christ."

A priest of advanced age, but with no merit, presented himself for a prebend. "I wish to assist you in getting your living," said his lordship to him; "but I also wish that you should render yourself capable of hearing confessions," and at the same time gave him a copy of his book on morals. But the priest would take no hint, but persisted in his demand, which he founded on merits he certainly did not possess. "I cannot in conscience nominate you," said Alphonsus, "if you do not at least render yourself fit to hear confessions." The irritated priest then rose, made a gesture of ill-humour, and almost tore the book, which he threw on the table, saying, "Plague take you and your morals." He then, turning on his heel, went out, giving vent to his fury. Such audacious conduct made every one present indignant, but Alphonsus was not at all moved by it. "See what it is to be a bishop," he said, quietly; "if a father does not bear with the impertinences of his children, who else will put up with them?"

TENTH DAY.

" Let every man be swift to hear, but slow to speak, and slow to anger, for the anger of man worketh not the justice of God. Wherefore, casting away all uncleanness, and abundance of naughtiness, with meekness receive the ingrafted Word, which is able to save your souls." (*)—*The Apostle St. James.*

" If it be possible, never suffer yourself to be betrayed into a passion, nor, upon any pretext whatsoever, allow the door of your heart to give admittance to any movement of anger; for as soon as it enters, you will cease to have control over it, and still less will it be in your power to expel it. If, notwithstanding all your efforts, it should have made its way into your soul through the weakness of your nature, endeavour calmly to recover your forces, and to regain tranquillity and peace of mind; but this must be done with great gentleness, and without any violent effort, for it is a great point not to renew the wound."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THE blessed Labrè acted most admirably in this. One day, when the servant of God was kneeling on the lowest step of the great door of the Church of the Apostles in Rome, praying, with his head bent down and his arms folded in the form of a cross on his breast, a rude and insolent boy threw a stone at him, which struck him so violently on the leg that it drew blood. The spectators were filled with just indignation against this insolent youth, who ran away, and they began to compassionate Benedict. But he showed no emotion nor resentment, nor did he turn to look at the boy, but remained quietly praying in his devout attitude, indifferent to the bleeding and to the pain, which must have been severe. Another time his left leg was struck

(*) James i. 19-21.

by a stone, which drew blood even through his stockings; but with his usual tranquillity, and as on the former occasion, he gave no sign of emotion or resentment. The servant of God had one day given to another poor man for an alms a bajocco, which he had a short time before received in a public street of Rome. The poor man, knowing this, suspected that he was dissatisfied with so small a piece of money, and that he gave it away, not out of pure charity, but as it were out of spite; and in a rage he rushed towards him, and giving him a blow with a stick, accused him of so doing. Benedict received this in peace, was silent and undisturbed; nor did he exculpate himself, but tranquilly continued on his way.

In his first pilgrimage to the holy house of Loretto, it is incredible how much he had to bear from false suspicions. The vicar of the district, and the canons of the collegiate church, seeing him for some days after his arrival praying for a long time in a fixed position in their church, as they did not know anything of him previously, suspected that he was feigning sanctity in order to commit thefts, which some other persons had done. They therefore drove him away. Benedict bore this expulsion with a tranquil mind and placid countenance; and without complaint or resentment went away humbly to beg the parish priest of St. Peter to be so good as to admit him into his church, which was very willingly granted.

One morning, after having prayed for a long time in the church of Santa Maria dei Monti, finding his strength exhausted, he went to sit down on a bench under the organ. Seeing a dog there, he drove it away. The owner of the dog seeing this grew angry, and began to abuse him, and was

so irritated that he was near striking him. Benedict's tranquillity amidst these insults was remarked and admired; he said not a word; he seemed like a statue, with his head bent down, quietly bearing these transports of rage.

The dominion which this blessed man exercised over the passion of anger attained the highest degree, which is, to desire insults and contempt, to esteem them more highly than the honours of the world, and to take pleasure in them when they occur. In contemplating the Passion of our blessed Redeemer, the sight of a God enduring, for the love of men, contempt, insults, and sufferings, made so much impression on him, that he thought it nothing, in comparison, when anything disagreeable happened to himself, through the malice of men: he valued more the participation in the insults and cross of Jesus Christ than in all the honours and riches which a deceitful world can offer.

St. Francis of Sales tells us of himself that he formed a resolution to practise the virtue of mildness at any cost; "even though my poor heart," says he, "should seem to be entirely upset with anger, though my head should be oppressed with the mist of indignation, and my blood should boil like water in a kettle, still will I endeavour to disregard all these sensations, and give no outward sign of these inward attempts of the enemy; I will do my best to preserve a gracious and gentle demeanour; and all the reasons which my evil nature shall suggest in order to justify violence, I will smother, absolutely deaf to what they urge."

Once it happened that a certain gentleman, believing himself to be offended by him, went to find him in his own house, and loaded him with abuse

and threats; the saint, who was entirely innocent of the charge, endeavoured to undeceive him, and to appease him with great mildness and gentleness. But the other, overpowered with indignation, continued to abuse and outrage him, until at length he went away, foaming with rage, and vowing vengeance. Upon this the saint, turning to a religious who had been present, and who was greatly edified at his great mildness, said, "Reverend father, it was necessary not to embitter any farther that poor man, nor to make him perceive his temerity; he will know it well one day, and then he will be sorry for it:" and so it turned out, for a few days afterwards he came and begged the saint's pardon. The admirable meekness which shone so brightly in him did not proceed from any natural calmness of disposition, as many might suppose, but from the continual violence he used to overcome his angry feelings. So much so, that it appears he was of a bilious and choleric temperament; and he confessed of himself that he had undertaken to subdue his temper by main force, and that he had continued this warfare for two-and-twenty years, constantly combating it with great constancy and heavenly courage. The truth of this was shown clearly after his death, for, on his body being opened, there were found in his gall-bladder three hundred little stones; an evident proof, as was declared by the physicians, of the innumerable violences that he had done himself to overcome the movements of anger.

In the same manner, also, acted many other great saints, in whose lives we read that they were never known to fall into a passion, but that, even on the most trying occasions, they preserved their usual serenity of demeanour and tranquillity of heart.

This is expressly mentioned of St. Anthony, St. Ephrem, St. Thomas of Aquin, St. Vincent of Paul, and many others. And in particular, it is recorded of the glorious St. Philip Neri, that when sometimes he felt it his duty to put on a severe countenance, in order to reprove some of his spiritual children, they were no sooner gone from his presence, than he resumed his usual placidity of look ; a proof this, to the bystanders, that his temper had not been in the least ruffled.

ELEVENTH DAY.

"It is better not to allow anger, however just and reasonable, to enter at all, than to admit it in ever so slight a degree. Once admitted, it will not be easily expelled, for although at first but a small plant, it will immediately grow into a large tree."—*St. Augustine.*

"The holy patriarch Joseph, when he sent back his brethren from Egypt to the house of his father, gave them this admonition: '*Be not angry with one another by the way.*' I would say the same to you. This life of wretchedness is a journey to a life of happiness yet to come. Let us then not be angry with one another by the way; but let us proceed with our brethren and companions, in meekness, peace, and charity. If it be possible, be not angry at all; open not your heart, on any pretext whatever, to give admittance to anger, for St. James says expressly, that '*the anger of man worketh not the justice of God.*' We must, it is true, resist evil, and vigorously and constantly restrain the vices of those who are under our charge, but this must be done with meekness and mildness. Nothing, it is said, so soon appeases the elephant, when enraged, as the sight of a lamb; and nothing so effectually breaks the force of cannon-shot as wool."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

Few even amongst the servants of God acted with more perfection upon these maxims than the venerable Margaret Alacoque. Her continual practice of prayer, her strict union with God, the austerity of her penitential life, the exactness of her regularity, and the humility and simplicity of her obedience, instead of attracting the admiration of those who witnessed them, by the especial permission of God, appeared to the eyes of the greater number of them as mere natural dispositions, or the effects of singularity. From different motives, either from antipathy, prejudice, or mistaken zeal, they found something to blame in whatever she said or did; her silence was attributed to stupidity, her mortifi-

cation passed for dangerous singularity, and her charity for littleness of mind. Her maladies were attributed to hypochondria, her communions and prayers were suspected of illusion, and even her humility and recollection of spirit were found fault with. She had not even a single friend who pitied her situation or defended her cause; and although the house possessed several holy and fervent religious, nevertheless God permitted, by a particular disposition of His providence, that the most devout should concur, through motives which appeared to them just and pious, in keeping her in contempt and humiliation. If she was thus used by the most virtuous, those who were less faithful to their vocation treated her still worse, and often said the most severe things against her, even in her own presence. A religious, who had been in the convent school under Sister Margaret, has deposed, in the information taken on the life and virtues of this holy nun, that seeing her so often treated as a visionary and a hypocrite, she one day said to her in confidence, that she was astonished they had so little regard for her, and treated her so ill; but that the humble mistress answered, "My child, these persons know me better than I know myself; therefore thank God with me for the favour which he sends me." Another has deposed, that being indignant at the cutting railleries that were uttered against the venerable servant of God, this holy mother said to her, "My dear child, let us go before the blessed Sacrament to ask forgiveness of our faults, and at the same time we will pray for those who have given me the opportunity of suffering something for Christ." There were in the house several very virtuous sisters, who, giving way to prejudice, thought themselves even obliged in con-

science to say seriously to Sister Margaret, that she ruined herself by her singularities, and that her conduct was a sort of scandal. Sister Margaret, in the midst of this ignominy and contempt, which made her, like Jesus Christ, despised and reviled, resembled Him no less in the patience and meekness with which she bore them. She received everything peacefully, listened to all with joy, neither avoided those that insulted her, nor retired from the conversations of the community, though it was particularly at these times that her humility was put to the greatest proof. No complaint, reproach, or murmur, ever issued from her mouth; her heart, even, was not moved or excited against her neighbour, either to resentment or coldness. "I admired," said the superior,—"I admired her disposition, ever undisturbed, always ready to converse and to be employed with persons who declared themselves against her, and who most highly disapproved of her conduct; she was just the same with them as with those who showed her the greatest friendship. Never," she continues, "did I perceive that she made the least complaint, or that her heart cherished the slightest feeling against them; and she never found herself so low in the eyes of any one as not to think that she was thought better than she deserved. The only thing which distressed Sister Margaret in these contradictions was her fear that they might give offence to God. But, without passing any disadvantageous judgment upon her sisters, she imputed the fault to herself alone, and accused herself, in all humility, of giving occasion to them."

The blessed Paul of the Cross suggests that when a person feels any interior provocation to anger, he should especially keep a strict guard over

his tongue, and keep silence. "When you feel," says he, "the assaults of passion and anger, then is the time to be silent. Jesus was silent in the midst of His ignominies and sufferings. O holy silence, rich in great virtues! O holy silence, which is a key of gold, keeping in safety the great treasure of holy virtues!" And thus he acted himself in similar cases. Once, in Leghorn, he was taken for a thief; for, having arrived late, and being fatigued with his journey, and not knowing whither to go for shelter, he entered a church. The sacristan, seeing him wretchedly clad, and in a miserable condition, drove him out, and would not listen to his entreaty to be allowed to pass the night there; he remained in the porch for shelter, till, as a person not to be trusted, he was driven thence also. He was treated worse by two foreign priests on the canal of Pisa, where, being in the same vessel with them, and having heard them utter some unbecoming words, on his entreating them, with all sweetness and humility, not to use words so ill suited to their sacred character, he was loaded with such insults and mockery, that those who heard them were horrified. But the humble servant of God, without answering one word, without being in the least discomfited, and preserving even a very peaceful and serene countenance, kept his mind interiorly fixed on the insults received by Jesus Christ in His passion, and on the knowledge of his unworthiness; and thus humbling himself, sank down into his own nothingness, where he found that tranquillity and repose which our Lord gives to the meek and humble of heart.

TWELFTH DAY.

"Let not the sun go down upon your anger. Give not place to the devil." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"How justly does the Apostle admonish us: '*Let not the sun go down upon your anger!*' For should anger be allowed to dwell in our hearts while we sleep at night, it will turn to hatred almost implacable, for it will be fed and nourished by a thousand vain pretexts, inasmuch as no man in anger thinks his anger unjust. It is better, therefore, to endeavour to withhold ourselves from anger altogether, than to attempt to be moderate and discreet in the use of it; and when, through imperfection and frailty, this passion surprises the heart, it is better at once to expel it, than to strive to keep it within proper bounds, for if it be allowed to remain for ever so short a time, it will gain the ascendancy; admit but the small head of the serpent, and it will easily insinuate its whole body."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint, after laying down this excellent rule against the passion of anger, suggests the following method in order to suppress it. "On the first attack," says he, "quickly collect all your forces, and oppose it, not violently and tumultuously, but mildly and firmly. For as the beadles in the public courts in crying silence make more noise than those whom they are endeavouring to quiet; so it often happens that by impetuously endeavouring to suppress our anger we agitate our souls more than the anger itself had done, and thus lose the mastery over ourselves. After such efforts, adopt the advice which St. Augustine, in his old age, gave to the young bishop Auxilius: 'Do what a man ought to do;' and if on any occasion you have cause to exclaim with the psalmist, '*Mine eye is troubled with wrath,*' (b) have immediate re-

(a) Ephes. iv. 26, 27. (b) Ps. xxx.

course to God, and with the same royal prophet implore Him, saying, '*Have mercy on me, O Lord*,' that He may stretch forth His right hand and extinguish your anger. When agitated by this passion, like the apostles in the midst of the storm, invoke his assistance and He will command your passions, and a great calm will presently ensue. But in all such prayers against present and pressing anger, let me admonish you to observe mildness and tranquillity, and not to give way to violence and agitation of spirit. This should be observed in all our struggles against this passion."

In his entertainments with his spiritual daughters, the nuns of the Visitation, the saint relates to them the following fact: "St. Pacomius, after having lived fourteen or fifteen years in the desert in great perfection, was favoured with a divine revelation, which imported that he would gain a considerable number of souls, and that many would crowd to the desert, to place themselves under his conduct. He had already some religious persons with him, of whom the first he had received was his elder brother, of the name of John. St. Pacomius accordingly began to enlarge his monastery, and to prepare a great number of cells. His brother John, either unacquainted with his design, or actuated with a zeal for holy poverty, one day reproved him severely by asking him if it was thus that he pretended to imitate our Lord, who, during His mortal life, had no place in which He might rest His head, with many similar remonstrances. St. Pacomius, although so holy a man, felt this reproof so sensibly that he turned aside, in order, as I imagine, to conceal the impression of anger which his countenance exhibited; but perceiving this, he immediately went and cast himself before

God in holy prayer, asking pardon for his fault, and uttering his pious complaints, that after living so long in the desert, he was not, as he said, sufficiently mortified. His prayer on the occasion was so humble and so fervent, that he obtained the grace of never more yielding to impatience.

The zeal which St. Vincent of Paul displayed to keep back from the sanctuary those who were not worthy to be admitted to it, or would force an entry by simony, exposed him to the blackest calumny. Efforts were made to destroy his reputation in the eyes of the queen, of the ministers of state, and of all good people in the kingdom. One of those men who are capable of anything, dared to report through Paris, and even to persons of the first distinction, that he who was apparently so great an enemy to simony, accommodated himself to it in practice. This report, which at first was circulated covertly, by degrees became public enough. One of the friends of Vincent informed him of it. However accustomed the holy priest was to suffer, such an atrocious imputation moved him a little, and on the first impulse he commenced a letter, with some warmth, in his justification; but he had scarcely written two lines when he reproached himself with his sensibility, and turning to himself he said, 'Miserable wretch! what art thou going to do? What! dost thou want to justify thyself? Hast thou not just heard that a Christian, falsely accused at Tunis, passed three days in torments, and died at last without the least word of complaint? .... And thou wishest to excuse thyself! No, it shall not be so.' At these words he threw down his pen, and suffered the public to think freely whatever they pleased. God took his vindication upon Himself. Those who had been

tempted to suspect his virtue soon abandoned their unjust prejudices; and the speedy death of the one who had outraged him so unworthily was looked upon by many as a chastisement from that watchful hand which, to discredit calumny, often strikes the calumniator.

The holy abbot Agatho used to say that he had never retired to rest without first having allayed every movement of vexation, even against himself; for he well knew how important it is in the spiritual life to preserve peace of mind, and to remember that maxim of the Holy Ghost, "Turn from evil and do good; seek peace and follow after it." It is often remarked by the holy fathers that care quickly to suppress the passion of anger as soon as we perceive it is most necessary, in order to walk in the path of virtue and share in the supernatural illumination of the Holy Ghost. "By anger," writes St. Gregory, "the light of truth is lost, as it is written: *Let not the sun go down upon your anger.* Because this passion envelopes the mind in darkness and confusion, and God hides, in consequence, the light of His knowledge. Through anger the splendour of the Holy Ghost is excluded from the soul, for it is written: "Upon whom shall my spirit rest, but upon the humble, the peaceful, and him that fears my words."([a]) And explaining the words of Ecclesiastes, where it is said: "Be not quickly angry, for anger resteth in the bosom of a fool,"([b]) he writes thus: "Anger resteth in the bosom of a fool, because by its excitement it confuses the mind, and takes away the light of reason." The holy father also particularly observes, that anger and perturbation of mind is a very great

([a]) Moral, lib. v. cap. 30. ([b]) Eccles. vii. 10.

hinderance to the spirit of prayer and contemplation; whereas meekness and tranquillity of mind is a very great help to it." "Contemplation," says he, "was never joined to commotion, nor can a disturbed mind attain what even a tranquil mind can scarcely behold." There are several facts in holy scriptures and in the lives of the saints which confirm this truth. When the prophet Elias fled into the desert from the fury of Queen Jezebel, he walked unto the mount of God, Horeb, where the Lord thus *spoke* to him: "Go forth, and stand upon the mount before the Lord: and behold the Lord passeth, and a great and strong wind before the Lord overthrowing the mountains, and breaking the rocks in pieces: the Lord is not in the wind: and after the wind an earthquake; the Lord is not in the earthquake: and after the earthquake a fire; the Lord is not in the fire: and after the fire, the whistling of a gentle air."(a) Again, in the fourth book of Kings we are shown how calm our passions ought to be, when we wish to pray and to converse with God. The holy scripture recounts, that Joram, king of Israel, Josophat, king of Juda, and the king of Edom, marching all three against the king of Moab, wanted water in the desert, so that their army was ready to perish. In this extremity they consulted the prophet Elias; and the king of Israel, who was an idolater, said to him: *Why has the Lord assembled these three kings here to deliver them into the hands of Moab? What is that to thee or me*, replied the prophet Elias; *go to thy father's and mother's prophets—as the God of armies liveth, in whose presence I am, were it not for the*

(a) 3 Kings xix. 11, 12.

respect I bear to Josophat, king of Juda, I would have had no regard to thee at all, nor would have so much as come into thy presence. Notwithstanding, let there be a musician brought hither.(a) Thus did the prophet, full of zeal and courage, reprehend the king of Israel, and reproach him for his idolatry. Yet, in fine, for the sake of Josophat, who was a holy and just king, he was moved to let them know the favours God designed to do them in that enterprise. But, because the fervour of his zeal had a little moved and disturbed him, that he might put himself into a proper disposition to converse with God, and receive His answer, he asked for a musician to calm and quiet his mind by the sweetness of music; and when he found it in calm and repose, he declared the wonders that God would work in their favour,—sending them water in abundance, and giving them the victory over their enemies. If it was necessary that a prophet, who was justly and piously moved, should appease this agitation of his mind before he could speak to God, or receive any answer from Him, how far more necessary is it for us to calm our irregular passions when we would cause Him to communicate Himself to us in prayer?

Who ever enjoyed a greater familiarity with God in his prayers than Moses, of whom the holy scripture says, that "God spoke to him mouth to mouth, and plainly, and not in riddles and figures?"(b) But it is said of him in the said chapter, that "He was a man exceeding meek above all men that dwelt upon the face of the earth."(c)

(a) 4 Kings iii. 13-15. (b) Numb. xii. 8.
(c) Numb. xii. 3.

Who, in old time, after Moses, was ever raised to a higher pitch of contemplation than the prophet David, to whom God communicated the most sublime and hidden truths, through the highest intellectual visions? But of him also the scripture says that he was particularly remarkable for his meekness. Hence the Psalm cxxxi. begins with those words: "O Lord, remember David and all his meekness." Meekness was a characteristic of the patriarch Abraham, who received frequent communications from God, and also of all the saints of the new law, who have enjoyed a close and intimate intercourse with God in prayer in proportion to their gentleness and meekness.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"It is better to be humble with the meek, than to divide spoils with the proud." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"In the Christian combat, not the striker, as in the Olympic contests, but he who is struck, wins the crown. This is the law in the celestial theatre, where the angels are the spectators."—*St. John Chrysostom.*

THE lives of the saints furnish abundant proofs of this. Of St. Joseph Calassanctius it is recorded that, after he had founded his Institute, and governed it as general for many years, God permitted that in consequence of a certain faction raised by some wicked members, the Sacred Con-

(a) Prov. xvi. 19.

gregation should appoint an extraordinary visitor, with power to visit all the houses of the Institute. By a hidden and divine judgment, the visitor chose for his first assistant in the work, Father Mario, the chief author of the faction, and the greatest and fiercest enemy of Calassanctius. This unhappy man, as soon as he found himself in office, resolved to oppress the brilliant innocence of the saint, and make him drink the cup of bitterness to the very dregs. Under the sanction of the visitor, he began to ill-treat and trample upon the saintly old founder. He took possession of, and opened all the letters written either by or to him; withdrew from him all the books of the order, shamefully taking from him that in which he noted down the most interesting memoranda: at the age of eighty-seven he deprived him of the person who assisted him in writing his letters; forbade anyone to go to him in his room, and dismissed great numbers from Rome, merely because their affection would not allow them to forsake their holy founder. In the midst of all this cruel treatment, never was a shade of discontent perceptible on the meek countenance of the saint, never did a murmur escape his lips. He knew how to respect the character of Superior even in his enemy, to whom he humbly and readily paid every mark of deference, to the admiration and astonishment of every one. He never went out of the house without going to Mario to ask his blessing, which he always did kneeling, and to ask him to appoint him a companion. On these occasions, the traitor received him with supercilious arrogance, and, after assigning him his companion, dismissed him with some opprobrious epithets, of which the most gentle were, hypocrite, foolish, &c. He received him in

the same manner on his return, and took care to examine his companion as to his every step and word, in hopes of finding some pretext for further insult. Joseph, in composure of soul, blessed the Lord, and received all this ill-treatment as a favour, and as a means of expiating his sins.

The other three assistant companions of Mario in the visitation, although not endowed with their holy father's virtue, yet were upright, simple, and quiet men. They could not endure the sight of Mario's cruelty to their venerated father; before the expiration of a month from their election, they openly expressed their detestation of the conduct of their colleague, separated themselves from him, renounced the charge of assistants, and thus washed their hands of the enormity of his guilt. Irritated at their integrity, and provoked at his inability to infuse any part of his own vile spirit into them, he entered the oratory like a fury from hell, when Joseph was praying there, and thus addressed him: "You doting old man! you crazy old man! these assistants won't obey me, and yet you do not compel them to do so!" Without a sign of discomposure, Joseph meekly answered, "These men have been chosen by you; it was not I who gave them to you; beware of the chastisements of God for the injury you are inflicting on the order. His indignation will soon fall upon you." On another day, Mario went to the saint's cell, with the intention of insulting him as usual; amongst other things, he said to him with great bitterness, "I will give you so much to do that I will cause you to die in a prison." "It will be as God pleases," meekly answered Joseph; "would to God it might be so, that I might thus do penance for my sins! You have begun, but you will not finish." And so

it happened; for scarcely had a year elapsed from Mario's causing Joseph to be disgracefully committed to prison by the Holy Office, when he himself fell ill, and was covered from head to foot with a hideous leprosy: the pestiferous malady so completely seized him and devoured his flesh, that he had more the appearance of a skeleton than of a human being. So insupportable was the stench which issued from his body, that his most intimate friends could not endure it,—even those who were engaged to attend him fled away. Every remedy was tried, but in vain. As soon as Calassanctius heard of the illness of his miserable son, he hastened, decrepid as he was, to the noviciate where Mario resided, to visit him, and regularly sent some of his religious every day to inquire after him.

When the doctors pronounced the case hopeless, the holy man lamented his inability to comfort and win Mario back to our Lord. The holy man caused the blessed sacrament to be exposed, and ordered all his religious to pray for the amendment of the dying man: up to the moment of his death, he daily remained prostrate in prayer and tears, to obtain the salvation of this guilty soul: such was the sweet revenge of Calassanctius!

Whilst St. Francis of Sales was a bishop, God permitted a calumny of the blackest dye to be spread against him through all the diocese, and to be believed by many. The calumny represented him as a most wicked impostor, as a true wolf under the clothing of a lamb. Three years elapsed with this cloud hanging over him, without any appearance of divine interposition in favour of his innocence. Francis, always tranquil and meek, always distinguished by an equality of temper,

happy in the testimony of a good conscience, and thus raised above the judgments of men, abandoned himself into the hands of God, and awaited in profound peace the time marked by divine Providence to reveal his innocence. At length the justice of God, which never loses sight either of the innocent or the guilty, came to his defence, and rescued him from the fury of evil tongues. The calumniator was struck with a most grievous and painful illness, which brought him to the threshold of eternity. In this melancholy situation, he acknowledged the horrible calumny which he had invented against the holy prelate, confessed it, charged his attendants to bear witness to the truth, and in particular, commissioned the physicians and surgeons to undeceive the duke of Nemours, and to go in his name and make satisfaction to the holy bishop. It was not difficult to obtain pardon from him, but divine justice was not to be so easily appeased, and the calumniator expired in the most excruciating pains. The holy prelate deplored his fate, offered public prayers for him, and testified a great regret that he had it not in his power to embrace him.

Ecclesiastical history is full of similar facts, which clearly demonstrate the truth of that sentence of holy David, that "The Lord is well pleased with His people, and will exalt the meek." (a)

(a) Ps. cxlix. 4.

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"Anger and fury are both of them abominable, and the sinful man shall be subject to them." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Beware not to disturb yourself, nor to be irritated on account of the defects of others, for it would be folly because you saw a man throw himself into a pit to throw yourself into another."—*St. Bonaventure.*

A DISSIPATED youth having been brought to St. Francis of Sales, in order that he might correct him, the saint treated him with the greatest gentleness, and, seeing how obstinate he was, shed bitter tears over him, telling him that he would make a bad end, as it afterwards turned out, for he was at last killed in a duel. When this happened, the saint was reproved by some for having shown too much gentleness and mildness on that occasion; but he answered, "What would you have had me do? I did as much as I could to put on a look of anger, as far as was possible, without committing sin; and for this, I endeavoured to summon up all my strength to speak to him in the most indignant manner, but I failed to do so; besides which, to say the truth, I feared to lose in a quarter of an hour all that little stock of meekness which, like a precious dew, I had endeavoured to gather up in my heart for the space of two-and-twenty years. That honey which a man collects in one instant from the hive, it took the poor bees many a month to form. And then, what use is there to speak to one not inclined to listen? This unhappy youth

(a) Eccl. xxvii. 33.

was not in a proper state to receive correction, because he was no longer master of himself, so that I should have done him no good, and might have done harm to myself; just like those persons who, rashly endeavouring to save others from shipwreck, are themselves drowned. Charity ought to be wise and prudent."

On one occasion, St. Philip Neri went to speak to a prelate in behalf of a Roman gentleman who had been falsely accused of a capital crime, and of whose innocence the saint had certain proof. The prelate not only refused to give ear to him in the matter, but reviled Philip in such a manner, that they who were present were astonished beyond measure, not only at the conduct of the dignitary, but much more at the meekness and gentleness of the saint in bearing those insults with such a cheerful countenance; in the end, however, the innocence of the accused was proved, and he was acquitted accordingly. Something similar occurred in the church of S. Giovanni d' Fiorentini, when a gentleman's servant, without any cause, began to insult Philip in a manner and with language so insolent, that a canon of St. Peter's, not being able to endure such impertinence, was about to lay hands on him, but then noticing the gentleness and joy with which the holy father took it all, he restrained himself, and, greatly edified with his meekness, from that day forward he honoured Philip as a saint. Another time, as the saint was out walking with some of his spiritual children, he met a cardinal who had given ear to false and sinister reports against him; and so strong was his prejudice against Philip, that as soon as he saw him he ordered his carriage to stop, and gave him a most bitter reprimand in public. The saint,

knowing the rectitude of the cardinal's intention, was not in the least disturbed, but with his usual smile, went up to him and whispered a few words in his ear. The countenance of the cardinal changed instantly, and, showing the holy father great marks of kindness, he said, "Go on, then, doing what you are doing now."

Once a certain prelate calumniated the saint to one of the cardinals, in order that his Eminence might oppose and hinder the exercises at St. Girolamo; and the calumny was of so serious a nature, that the cardinal spoke to the Pope about it: Philip, although he knew what had passed, never said a word against his accuser, but went very often to the cardinal, from whom he received many mortifications. By this means the saint became completely master of himself.

St. Ignatius, having left his father's house and embraced a life of perfect poverty, chanced to ask an alms of a certain noble lady whom he met in the way. This lady was in great distress on account of the evil conduct of her son, who had run away from his home and wandered about in a disorderly manner, and when she perceived a certain air of nobility about Ignatius, she thought he must be a person of the same description, and began to rebuke him with indignation, calling him a lazy vagabond, and heaping upon him a number of similar epithets. Ignatius mildly listened till she had finished all she had to say, and then humbly thanked her, saying that he was deserving of all her abuse, and of far more than she had said, for there did not exist in the world a man more worthless than himself. His manner in saying this showed they were not mere words, but the true feelings of his heart; and the lady, in great astonishment at receiving such an

answer, perceived what a fault she had committed: her anger was changed into reverence, and she begged his forgiveness, gave him a large alms, and afterwards described this adventure with great emotion; and when the saint returned from Jerusalem, she showed herself much devoted to him, and under his directions greatly advanced in virtue.

In the life of the blessed Sebastian Valfré, it is related that one morning he wished, through devotion, to say the votive mass of our Lady, and gave the brother sacristan notice of this, that he might take out the suitable vestments. The latter refused to do so; and Valfré, who could have obliged him to obedience, without losing the state of recollection in which he ever was before celebrating mass, opened not his lips, except merely to utter these words: "Well, I will do as you please; I will say mass to-day as others do; the votive mass I will say another day." And thus it was to be. But the sacristan a little while after considering the matter, felt so much remorse, that he went and threw himself at the feet of Sebastian, begging him to pardon his disobedience and want of humility.

Once, as he was on his way to a prison, he bought a basket of most beautiful cherries, and having carried them with him, he distributed them with his own hand to the prisoners. While with all charity he was making this distribution, some of the most disorderly prisoners, as they ate the fruit, threw the stones at his head and in his face, he meanwhile pretending not to be aware of it. A priest who was with him, kindling with indignation at such conduct, could not keep himself from saying, "Are you aware, Father Valfré, that these people are making game of you? Let us go;

these ungrateful beings do not deserve your kindness." All gentleness and patience, Sebastian replied, "No, no, these are our brethren in Jesus Christ; let us strive to gain them; they are only trying to amuse themselves a little, let us pity them; poor fellows, I am grieved for them." The priest, astonished at such meekness, from that time considered the servant of God truly a saint.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"My son, do thy works in meekness, and thou shalt be beloved above the glory of men." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"We ought to behave ourselves sweetly towards all, with such a demeanour as is wont to spring from a tender heart filled with Christian charity, that is, with affable love and humility; these virtues serve admirably to gain the hearts of men, and to encourage them to embrace even what is most repugnant to nature."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

Such exactly was his conduct, and by this he performed great wonders for the good of souls. He had to treat, and often on the same day, with persons of refined intellect and with those destitute of education; yet he was to all as St. Paul, conjuring the Christians by the meekness and modesty of Jesus Christ. He everywhere awakened the idea of the Saviour conversing with men. There was never any sign of displeasure on his countenance, any asperity in his words, or impatience in his ges-

(a) Eccl. iii. 19.

tures. With heretics and with poor country people especially, he showed great affability and mildness. He had once the consolation to gain three Protestants to the church on the same day, mainly by his unction and mildness. As to the country people, who were always the great objects of his zeal, he was persuaded that they are only to be benefited by patience and meekness. In his opinion, that oracle of the scripture, "make thyself affable to the congregation of the poor," should be the rule of every priest. He was the first to put it in practice, and if the missions he made among the galley-slaves were attended with a success which astonished France, it was to be attributed in a great measure to the extreme mildness with which he treated them. Indeed, that virtue which is so full of charms had in him something so natural, so prudent, that it was difficult to resist it. A gentleman accustomed to swearing having once said, before many other persons, that he wished the devil had him, the saint kindly embraced him, and said, with a smile: "And I, sir, will keep you for God; it were a pity His enemy should have you." These few words edified the company very much; and he to whom they were addressed was especially struck. He acknowledged his fault, and promised to correct himself. The mildness of the saint pursued that just medium which knows neither deficiency nor excess.

St. Francis of Sales conducted himself with such meekness towards all, that without any violence he carried every thing his own way, and accomplished all that he desired; and he accomplished it in a manner at once so gentle and so winning, that no one could resist the force of his persuasion; and it was sufficient for any one to look at his counte-

nance to become his captive, and that too without perceiving it. He treated all with respect, received all affectionately, and endeavoured to please all, with great sweetness and cordiality; and this gave him such a power and influence over hearts, that all yielded him the most perfect compliance. And as he sought to accommodate himself to all, so they in return willingly complied with his desires, which had no other view than that all men should be devoted to the divine service, and placed in the way of salvation. He used to say, "Resist, faithfully, all impatience; not only following what reason absolutely demands; but even going beyond what it requires; behave with holy courtesy and sweetness towards all men; especially towards those who trouble and vex you the most."

A certain heretical woman, of a most troublesome disposition, for a long while called upon him several times in the course of the day, suggesting on each occasion some new difficulty; the saint always listened to her with great affection, never showing any signs of weariness. The woman, although not yet converted, was so enchanted with the mildness and engaging manners of the saint, that she never felt happy out of his presence. At last she came one day and told the blessed man of God that her mind was quite made up upon every point of Catholic doctrine, excepting the celibacy of the clergy. To this the saint replied; this discipline of the church is necessary, in order that the clergy may attend better to their flocks, not having their time taken up with the care of a family; and that, in fact, he himself would not be able to give so much attention to her, if he were obliged to maintain a wife and family. This simple answer, delivered in his engaging manner, did more to con-

vince her than the most learned theological argument, and she was converted.

One day, as St. Ignatius and his companions were passing by some reapers, these began to scoff and reproach him. Whereupon the saint, being unwilling to deprive them of such a satisfaction, waited with a tranquil look until they had finished, and after that gave them his blessing and went away. At this they were filled with admiration, and declared him to be a saint.

As St. Francis of Assisi was ascending Mount Alvernia with some of his companions, a certain unlettered farmer, who was their guide, addressed the saint as follows: "Brother, I hear much good spoken of you, and I understand that God has shown you great favours, for which you are greatly indebted to him; strive then to be always what you are said to be, in order that those who have confidence in you may not be deceived: this is a piece of advice I give you." Francis, delighted at what he heard, dismounted, kissed the man's feet, thanked him, and praised the great mercy of God, who had been pleased to cast His eyes on the lowliness of His servant. This admirable meekness greatly edified the man, who conceived greater respect for Francis than ever, and became a great admirer of his sanctity.

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"Behold I send you as lambs among wolves." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"If you desire to labour with fruit for the conversion of souls, it behoves you to mix the balsam of gentleness with the strong wine of your zeal, to the end that the latter be not too ardent, but benign, pacific, long-suffering, and full of compassion. For the natural character of men is such that, when treated with harshness, it becomes still more hardened, whereas mildness soon softens it. Moreover, we ought to remember that Jesus Christ came to bless men of good will, and if we give up our own will to His guidance, we may be sure that He will render it fruitful."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

It was thus that he himself proceeded, even towards the most obstinate sinners, endeavouring to bring them to true repentance by the mildest possible means. On one occasion, as a man who had been guilty of the most enormous sins was making his confession to the holy bishop, without the least appearance of shame or repentance, the saint, after hearing him for awhile, burst into tears; upon this the man asked him if he was suffering from pain, little thinking that it was his own enormous sins that drew forth the tears; the saint replied, "Go on." The man proceeded to relate, with the same indifference, other crimes still greater, and the holy bishop again burst into tears, so much so that the man asked him again why he wept; whereupon the saint answered, with a voice full of compassion, "I weep because you do not weep." These words so wounded the heart of that unhappy sinner, that

(a) Luke x. 3.

he became a true penitent. But the sweetness and gentleness of St. Francis appeared chiefly in the way of giving advice; which at the same time inspired those who received it with regret for past failings, and with an earnest desire of perfection for the future. When he beheld a soul swallowed up by sin, or exposed to dangerous occasions, he would exclaim, "Tear yourself away at once, break off entirely; hesitate not, delay not; endeavour not to unravel the snare, cut it away at once." In other matters, which did not form dangerous occasions of sin, he would gently exhort people to proceed by degrees, retrenching all superfluities, and everything that savoured of the world. In a letter to a lady he writes thus: "Do you not perceive that vines are not pruned with the heavy blows of an axe, but with a little pruning hook, which lops off the redundant branches? I have seen certain works of sculpture, on which the artist spent full ten years in polishing them up, continually chiselling away whatever little inequality or unseemliness might remain, until his work became quite perfect. You must not expect to find it possible to arrive in a single day at the perfection you aspire to; you must gain one point to-day and another to-morrow, and thus by degrees obtain the mastery over yourself; which, indeed, will be no slight victory."

One of his favourite maxims, upon which he squared his own conduct, is the following: "There is nothing that so much edifies our neighbour as an affectionate benignity of demeanour, by means of which, as oil keeps a lamp burning, the flame of good example is maintained."

It is related of St. Macarius the elder, that by his extraordinary meekness he wrought greater

wonders in conducting souls to God than by any of his miracles. An instance appears in the case of a pagan priest, who, having been excited to fury by the contemptuous treatment he had met with from one of the religious, was not only appeased, but gained over on the spot to Jesus Christ, by the mildness and sweetness wherewith he was treated by St. Macarius; so that he immediately quitted the world to become a religious, and by his example occasioned the conversion of many other pagans.

We read the same thing of the glorious St. Philip Neri. By his admirable sweetness he succeeded so well in the conversion of souls, that the penitents themselves were filled with wonder and amazement. A youth of high spirits went very often to hear St. Philip's sermons at San Girolamo. It was, however, rather to make game of the exercises than through any serious intention of turning to God. Some of the brothers of the oratory perceived this, and being displeased with his conduct, mentioned it to the holy father, in order that he might apply some remedy. "Have a little patience," he answered, "and do not doubt." The youth still persevered in turning the oratory into ridicule, without showing any signs of amendmend. The saint, however, would not allow a word to be said to him. The good father's patience was not in vain; by little and little the youth was softened, as well by the word of God as by Philip's incessant prayers. He began to reflect upon his misconduct, and conceived such contrition that he gave himself entirely into Philip's hands; under his direction he grew so fervent that, by the holy father's counsel, he entered into the order of St. Dominic, and died a holy death during his noviciate.

Once St. Vincent of Paul charged one of his missionaries to take under his special care a certain great sinner, in order to bring him to true penance; but the missionary, finding all his words ineffectual, entreated the saint to speak a little to him himself. The blessed man did so, and with such success that he quite converted him. This person afterwards declared that it was the singular sweetness and charity of the saint that had gained his heart, and that never before had he heard any one else speak of God in so moving a manner.

St. Jane Frances of Chantal gave the following result of her experience to a superior of her order. "The older I grow, the more necessary I find it to be possessed of the virtue of mildness, in order to gain an entrance into the hearts of others, and to preserve any influence over them, so as to guide them to fulfil those duties which they owe to God. And whenever I have done anything for those souls who have had recourse to me for advice, I have always accomplished my object by means of a mild and humble spirit of charity, without using any other authority than that of earnest prayer."

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"We must endeavour to imitate the forbearance of God. O, how great is God's forbearance! He endures patiently the Temples of the profane men, who outrage His majesty; He endures idols and sacrilegious ceremonies; He makes the sun to shine upon the evil and upon the good, and His rain to descend upon the just and on the unjust: He makes the elements serve all men alike, the impious as well as the good; the winds blow, the springs burst forth, the harvests swell with waving corn, the grapes ripen, the trees cover themselves with fruit, the forests put on thick foliage, the meadows adorn themselves with the enamel of flowers. God delays vengeance, and patiently waits, that man may correct himself and return to his Saviour. Such is the forbearance of the eternal Father, and similar to it was that of the Son: for all the actions of Jesus Christ were characterized by patience, and by that divine evenness of soul of which nothing could interrupt the tranquillity. Accordingly, we find in the Scriptures that the patriarchs and prophets and just men who prefigured Jesus Christ, are principally distinguished by this constant patience and evenness of soul. Such was that of Abel, of Abraham, of Isaac, of Jacob, of Joseph, of Moses, of David." —*St. Cyprian.*

"He who has the direction of souls, should endeavour to behave himself towards them according to the example of God and the angels; that is, with gentle insinuations, admonitions, and prayers, and with all patience and skilfulness. He must knock at the door of hearts, as doth the heavenly Spouse, sweetly endeavouring to open it; and if he succeeds in this, introduce therein salvation with all joy: if, on the contrary, he is refused admittance, he must endure and support it with all patience. Exactly thus is it that our sweet Lord Jesus acteth towards us. Though He is the absolute Lord of all hearts, yet what resistance does He not suffer from us against the illuminations of His grace?—what rebellions against His holy inspirations? And although He is obliged to withdraw Himself from those who are unwilling to walk according to His way, yet ceaseth He not to return after awhile, and to renew His holy inspirations and most loving invitations. Behold, too, how in this our angel guardians imitate the example of their Lord and Master! Ah! how do they warn, direct, and assist to the utmost of their power, those

whom God has entrusted to their guidance! And even when these blessed spirits perceive them to be obstinate and hardened in an evil course, they do not for all that abandon them, or give way to bitterness, grief, and vexation, or lose a single point of their own essential beatitude. What better examples than these can we desire, whereupon to form our own conduct?"—*St. Francis of Sales.*

In treating with those persons who were but weak in the spiritual life and only beginners, St. Francis of Sales made it his rule to follow the example of the holy patriach Jacob, who regulated the length of his journeys by the strength of his little children, not even forgetting the tender little lambs that accompanied him on his way.

When St. Francis of Assisium sent his brethren to preach and labour for the conversion of sinners, he recommended to them, in an especial manner, patience, meekness, and humility of heart. "Go," said he to them, "and exhort men to penance for the remission of their sins, and for peace. You will find some among the faithful, mild and good, who will receive you with pleasure, and willingly listen to you; others, on the contrary, without religion, proud and violent, will censure you, and be very hostile to you; but make up your minds to bear all this with humble patience, and let nothing alarm you. In a very short time many learned and noble persons will join themselves to you, to preach to kings, to princes, and to nations. Be, therefore, patient in tribulations, fervent in prayer, and fearless in labour. Be unassuming in speech, be grave in your manner, and grateful for the favours and benefits you may receive. The kingdom of God, which is eternal, will be your reward. I intreat the one and only God, who lives and reigns in Three Persons, to grant it to us, as he

doubtless will do, if we are faithful to fulfil all that we have voluntarily promised."

In accordance with the injunctions of their holy father, the zealous and fervent religious entered upon their holy undertaking with a generous heart and burning with patient and kind charity. As soon as any one addressed them, they wished him peace, and instructed him in the way to gain it. If any one appeared to them to have strayed from the way of salvation, they endeavoured to bring him back in a mild and humble manner. In their sermons they spoke ingenuously, pointed out the true way to heaven, showed what were the duties of charity, and endeavoured to bring all to love and fear the Creator, and keep His holy commandments.

The lesson of Christian meekness and humility which the holy patriarch St. Francis gave to his children he was himself most careful to fulfil. Once having come to Imola, he went in the first place to offer his respects to the bishop, and asked permission to preach to his people. "I preach," replied the bishop, coldly, "and that is quite enough." Francis bowed humbly and retired; but an hour afterwards he returned, and the bishop, surprised and angry at seeing him again, asked him what he could possibly want? To which he replied, in a tone of sincere humility: "My lord, if a father drives his son out of the house by one door, it is right that the son should return through another." The bishop, mollified by this mild address, embraced him with affection, and said: "From henceforth you and your brethren may preach in my diocese. I give you a general leave, it is what your humility has merited."

The writers of the life of St. Francis thus speak of his personal qualities: "Our blessed father was agreeable to all; joy, serenity, kindness, and modesty were perceptible in his countenance. He was naturally mild and affable, compassionate, liberal, prudent, and discreet; he gave sound advice, was faithful to his word, and full of courage; he was easy in his manners, accommodating himself to all sorts of tempers; he was all to all; a saint among the saintly, and among sinners as if he was one of them; his conversation was graceful, and his manner insinuating; he was close in his reasoning, energetic and compliant in matters of business; and finally, simple in all his actions and words."

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"It is better to err by excess of mercy than by excess of severity. . . . . Wilt thou become a saint? Be severe to thyself, but kind to others."—*St. John Chrysostom.*

"It is better to have to give an account to God for too much mercy than for too much severity."—*St. Antonine.*

One of the greatest crimes which our blessed Saviour reprehended in the Pharisees was, that they were excessively indulgent to themselves and most severe to others. "They bind," he said of them, "heavy and insupportable burdens, and lay

them on men's shoulders; but with a finger of their own they will not move them." (a)

But far different is the conduct of those who are animated by the spirit of God. Deeply impressed, on the one side, with the feeling of their own unworthiness and sinfulness, and animated on the other by sincere Christian charity, which is patient and benign, they use great severity to themselves, and are full of benignity and mercy to others.

Once St. Francis of Sales was blamed for having pardoned with too much facility a most grievous crime, committed by certain religious against his own person. On this occasion a clergyman, who was a friend of his, observed that he should wish to be Francis of Sales, when he should have to appear before the tribunal of God, but that he should not like to be responsible for the faults committed by him from an excess of mildness. "You would be more embarrassed," replied the holy prelate, "if you were to answer for Francis in other things; but however that may be, I would rather fail by an excess of kindness than by the extreme of severity, for in this I have the authority of Jesus Christ my master, who will be my judge, and I cannot be wrong in following Him." The day after he had pardoned these religious men, the prior came to make his complaints; but Francis anticipated the subject, by observing to him that he was happy in enjoying an infallible means of obtaining the remission of his sins, unquestionably more enormous in the sight of God than the offence which had been done to him. "Pardon," said Jesus, "and you shall be pardoned. In the same measure that you measure to others, it shall be measured to you."

(a) Matt. xxiii. 4.

The blessed Paul of the Cross was most affectionate and kind towards all, but especially towards sinners. He was like an anxious mother healing the wounds of her children. Knowing by experience the happy effects of kindness upon these poor creatures, he inculcated the same treatment to all persons who had the charge of souls. He was accustomed to say that gentleness gains the most obstinate sinners, while harshness drives away contrition. Upon this subject he used to relate an instructive fact. He was sitting one day in the confessional, when a poor man came up and whispered, "Father, hear my confession; it is twelve years since I have approached the sacraments." Father Paul, struck by his earnestness, begged him to wait a little, and follow him as soon as he should leave the confessional. He conducted the penitent to a retired spot, and, with the greatest charity, disposed him to make a general confession. When this was over, he asked the penitent what had been his motive for neglecting his religious duties so long. The poor man replied, "The last time I went to confession my director scolded me with great severity, and sent me away, saying, 'Go, you will be damned.' I have been too much frightened ever since to approach a confessional again." Several years afterwards, this person met the servant of God again, and directly he perceived him, he ran to kiss his hand, saying, "I must tell you, father, that ever since I saw you I have remained faithful by the grace of God, and have been preserved from the sins I then confessed."

St. Bernard, on being made abbot, proceeded at first with such severity and rigour in the reformation of discipline, that though he was greatly respected by his monks, he lost all influence over

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them; but being admonished by our Lord that he should try what he could do by gentleness and lenity, he followed the inspiration, and with such success as to gain the affections of all, receiving from them the most perfect obedience.

St. Vincent of Paul, though towards himself he was most rigorous and exact, even in the smallest things, yet towards others was always full of charity and sweetness, endeavouring to content them in everything reasonable. When he commanded, his manner was so controlled by humility, and his words so full of respect and gentleness, that he seemed rather to entreat than to command. When he designed to lay upon any one a disagreeable charge or business, he endeavoured to dispose him to it by degrees, and with much skill softened the difficulties which at first sight might have disgusted him. And on every occasion he proceeded with such affability and cordiality, that he gained the hearts of all, and was punctually obeyed even in the most difficult things. Many ascribed to him their perseverance in the service of God, being moved thereto by his charity, sweetness, gentleness, and patience.

St. Philip Neri was most kind towards sinners, and by his great sweetness and gentleness, wrought the most wonderful conversions amongst them. One day a penitent threw himself at his feet, so dreadfully entangled in the net of a certain sin, that hardly a day passed without his falling into it. To this person he gave no other penance than that, as often as he was guilty of that sin, he should immediately return to him to make his confession, without delaying or waiting to fall into it a second time. The penitent obeyed, and the saint always gave him absolution, enjoining no other penance

but that. And by these simple means, he succeeded in a short time in rescuing him not only from that vice, but from all his other sins, and even conducting him to a high degree of perfection. With a youth of most dissolute habits, he did nothing but advise him to say every day seven *Salve Reginas*, and then to kiss the ground, saying these words, "To-morrow I may be dead." The youth did as he was told, and in a short time returned to a pious life, and after fourteen years spent in great devotion and the constant exercise of good works, died in the odour of sanctity. By these and other similar means, the saint brought back a vast number of sinners to the way of God, many of whom, when they came to their last hour, exclaimed, "Blessed be the day and the moment in which I first knew Father Philip."

NINETEENTH DAY.

"Agreeableness in conversation is of great importance, for which we must be humble, patient, respectful, and condescending to the humour of others, as far as we lawfully can. Above all, let us beware of ever contradicting another's opinion without an evident necessity; and even when obliged to do so, we ought to use great gentleness and skill, so as not to put him out of temper. By these means we shall avoid debates and disputes, which produce nothing but bitterness, and, for the most part, spring more from an attachment to our own opinions, than from the love of truth. Believe me, as, on the one hand, there is no spirit more destructive of harmony in society than that which is fond of contradiction, so, on the other, there is none that more secures it than that which never contradicts any one. — *St. Francis of Sales.*

"In religious orders, union and peace ought to be preferred before all other advantages, and they are secured by mutual forbearance, and a carriage full of sweetness; for this heavenly sweetness and mildness is a fountain of peace and a bond of perfection which uniteth hearts."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

In conformity with this maxim, the saint always treated the members of his congregation with admirable sweetness and gentleness, conversing with them with a serene and cheerful look. He showed towards them the utmost affection, and a fatherly cordiality, especially when he sent any of them on a mission, or on any distant journey. And when they returned, he spoke to them with such kindness, and embraced them with such tenderness, as won their hearts; so that a devout member of the congregation had occasion to say: "When I set out on a journey, or when I return home, it is a great comfort to me to behold the affectionate manner in which our holy Superior receives and embraces me. His words are so full of spiritual

unction, so sweet and yet so efficacious, that, without violence, they oblige one to do what he desires." His manner was also just the same when they had recourse to him for any spiritual want; he listened to them with the greatest affability and patience, never showing the least sign of annoyance, however urgent or important the other occupations he had upon his hands might be. On a certain occasion, one of his priests went to him greatly troubled, being resolved to forsake his vocation, and to return to his native place; but the blessed man, having listened to him, said with great sweetness, "Well, my friend, when you leave us, will you go on foot or on horseback?" The mildness and benignity of this answer conveyed such an effectual, though silent, reproof to the heart of the other, that he felt himself immediately freed from the temptation, and proclaimed to all that his Superior was indeed a saint. This servant of God, when he was obliged to notice a defect in any one, was always very careful to conceal the individual on whose information he spoke. So that if he feared he might give occasion to suspicions or aversion against anyone, he would even abstain from correcting the fault, rather than disturb the harmony of the community. He held as a maxim, that however necessary it is to be determined as to the end which we propose, it is nevertheless expedient to use all sweetness and gentleness in the means which we take to effect that end, in imitation of the Divine wisdom, which, although it is unchangeable in its decrees, nevertheless sweetly disposes the means that are designed to effect them.

The venerable John Berchmans, having been appointed admonitor in the noviciate, declared that he never related anything to the Superior, without

first consulting with God in the presence of the blessed Sacrament; and this he did, not only to avoid disturbing the peace of others, but also that he might not be deceived himself by his own judgment and self-love.

The blessed Peter Claver, another bright pattern of Christian gentleness and meekness, for sake of union and peace, willingly subjected himself to great humiliations. It is related in his Life, that whilst he was labouring most successfully among the negroes, some fathers in the college disapproved his manner of acting with them. According to them, his zeal was indiscreet and precipitate. There were even some, both within and without the college, who for some years treated his zeal as the effect of caprice, his constancy as obstinacy, his mortification as harshness of character, his tenderness for the negroes as a mania, his recollection as ignorance, and his sanctity as illusion. Others, less vehement, condemned the multiplicity of his occupations, the distraction of his employment, the time he lost in it, and the trouble he gave his interpreters, who became thereby less serviceable to the house. If a negro did not answer correctly their questions, or did not open his mouth properly to receive the sacred Host at holy communion, these zealots laid it to the charge of the servant of God, whom they assailed with most bitter reproaches; they even appealed to his superiors, and as the holy man never said a word in his own defence, he was always thought to be in the wrong, and guilty of imprudence. Being once very severely reprimanded by a provincial, who was shocked at hearing a slave spoken of as "Father Claver's negro," the holy man listened to him without saying a word, although he had had nothing more

to do in the matter than that he had procured the little negro's admission into the college.

It would scarcely be believed how much he had to suffer from a certain Portuguese brother, a rough, violent man, whose conduct was so unlike that of a religious, that he was expelled from the society some time afterwards. As this man had to accompany the good father in his external ministry against his will, he took pleasure in keeping him waiting a long time when he wanted to go out, scolded him continually on the road, and when it was necessary to hasten, he would purposely stop, insomuch that, however desperate a case of sickness it might be to which the father was going, he was obliged to wait till his brother's whim was past. Within the house, there was no sort of outrage he did not inflict on him; he called his saintly occupations ridiculous fancies, and his piety hypocrisy, and, staring impudently in his face, he used to reproach him with being nothing better than a fanatic. Through all which treatment the holy man never answered him a word, humbly looking on him as a scourge, justly sent by God, to punish him for his sins.

TWENTIETH DAY.

"As without faith it is impossible to please God, so without mildness it is impossible to please men."—*St. Bernard.*

"The only object of a Superior ought to be the love of God and the sanctification of the subjects entrusted to his care; and there is no better way of arriving at this than by the exercise of humility, by a gracious demeanour, and by constant good example."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

This blessed saint was most particular in recommending superiors to endeavour to render the yoke of obedience sweet to their subjects by carefully avoiding imperiousness of manner or excessive severity, and by adopting a conduct full of respect and affection. Hence, to one whom he sent to be superior of a certain house, he gave this advice: "Let it not be your object to appear the master and superior. I differ very much in opinion from a person who said to me yesterday, that in order to govern well and maintain authority, a superior ought to show himself in character as such. O my God! how opposite was the language of Jesus Christ to this! how different a lesson did He teach us both by word and deed! He used to say that He came not into the world to be ministered unto, but to minister; and that he who would be the master, must first make himself servant of all. Conform yourself, then, to this holy maxim, behaving towards those over whom the care is intrusted to you as if you were one of them, *quasi unus ex illis;* telling them, as soon as you are arrived amongst them, that you are not to be lord over them, but to serve them. If you will practise

this advice, both within and without the house, you will find yourself well satisfied with it." Writing to another, whom he had also sent to be a superior, he expressed himself thus: "What you ought to do is to devote yourself wholly to God, so as not to be a burden to any one, and to treat all with affability and respect, making use always of kind expressions, but never of harsh or imperious ones; for there is nothing more calculated to gain hearts than this sweet and humble method of acting; nothing will enable us better to accomplish the great end we have in view, which is the glory of God and the greater sanctification of men. Writing to the director of a mission who had with him a companion somewhat liable to defects, he said: "If you wish to be accompanied by the blessing of God, make it your chief study to be mild with this companion: on every occasion speak in such a manner that, forgetting your own superiority, you accommodate yourself to him in a spirit of charity. This was the way by which Jesus Christ gained the hearts of His disciples, and brought them on to holy perfection; and there is no other way for you to gain over your companion. With this object, then, yield occasionally to his humour; never contradict him at the moment when you believe you have the most right to do so, but only when there is necessity; admonish him some time afterwards, and then with great humility and cordiality."

The blessed Paul of the Cross acted in the same manner. A few days before his last illness he went to the sacristy for a private conference with some devout person. Finding a lay brother there, who remained to finish what he was about, after he had begged him to leave the room, he said to him with some warmth, "But, brother, I told you to make

haste, as I want to speak to this person." No sooner had he uttered these words than he was seized with remorse, as if he had committed a great crime. He went to that brother, and with great humility said many times: "Brother, pardon me, for the love of God, if I have offended you," and was inconsolable till he was solemnly assured by the brother that he had not been in the least hurt by the reproof, but had deserved it most justly for neglecting to obey his father and superior.

During the days immediately preceding the chapter, he gave audience to each one, and like a most tender father, left them most excellent words of advice. To the different rectors of the *Ritiri* he spoke much on the tenderest charity in governing, and of gentleness and kindness towards their brethren in religion, in order that thereby being more and more animated and encouraged, they might attend more diligently to perfection.

When St. Jane Frances of Chantal perceived anything in a house that was wrong, she corrected it with a frankness truly humble, maternal, and generous, and when informed of any faults, she never hesitated to write about them without the slightest flattery, with all sincerity and cordiality, pointing out the evil and showing the remedy with admirable ingenuity. The writers of her life remark that the more she advanced in age and in perfection, the more gentle became her government, and in the last year of her mortal existence she said to the honoured Mother de Blonay, "My very dear mother, I have veered and turned to every side that can be imagined, I have considered and tried every mode of government, and after all I have seen, I have found that that of mildness, humility, sincerity,

and patient forbearance is the best, and the one which the Superiors of the Visitation should keep to."

The much beloved and revered father in Christ Antony Rosmini, on sending for the first time some members of the Institute of Charity into England, delivered the following instructions to Father Gentili, whom he had charged with the office of superior:—

"You are constituted superior over your companions; but they are to be your counsellors, especially with regard to the external affairs of the Institute . . . Your duty towards them may be divided into two parts: first, to procure their sanctification; secondly, to regulate their charity according to the spirit of the Institute. To attain both these objects, the advice already given to you will prove very useful, also to them—that is, let them completely subdue their self-love, in order to yield submissively to the ordinances of superiors; and also let them be ready and glad, unconditionally, to sacrifice themselves for their neighbours, according to the known will of God. Observe, however, that your companions' self-love is not to be overcome by irritation, but by using the most delicate suavity of manners. The means of rendering them victorious over self-love is to set them an example of humility and sacrifice, the sincerity of which should shine through your every word and action. In the instructions, general and particular, on the self-sacrifice necessary for the practice of unlimited charity, let there be nothing harsh and arbitrary; but contrariwise, let all be compassionate and reasonable. In the exercise of works naturally humiliating and mortifying, let them see that when the occasion is presented them by Providence,

it is God himself who obliges the superior to impose what is, though difficult, not above their strength. Correct judgment in this is a gift of God, and by superiors must be solicited with many prayers and tears. Towards each ever show your love and esteem, and dispose of them '*cum magna reverentia*.' In your laughter avoid every symptom of scorn and shadow of derision, and let your features be graced by an affectionate smile and cheerful gravity, which ought ever to characterize a Christian, and especially a member or superior of our Institute."

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"A mild answer breaketh wrath, but a harsh word stirreth up fury." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Whenever you are engaged in bringing about a reconciliation between enemies, in composing a lawsuit, or in persuading another to do something, endeavour always to be as mild as possible. You will always do more, and prevail farther, by yielding and humbling yourself, than by austerity or over-earnestness. Does not every one know that more flies are caught by a single ounce of honey than by a hundred barrels of vinegar?"—*St. Francis of Sales.*

DEEPLY impressed with this maxim, this saint, when employed in the mission to the Calvinists, determined never to make use of any injurious terms in speaking of them and their doctrines, and

(a) Prov. xvi. 1.

never to oppose to their insults and outrages anything but meekness and invincible patience. His associates on the mission blamed him on this account, and charged him with too kind attention to the enemies of the faith. They urged that he did not sufficiently avail himself of the authority of his sovereign, with which he was known to be invested. By departing from the principle of Christian meekness these accusers of Francis nearly counteracted the grand business of reconciling the people of Chablais to the church; and ultimate success was only secured by following his discreet advice, and to him the whole honour of this proceeding was afterwards attributed.

St. Basil gives a very profitable instruction for the conduct of religious who are employed in functions of external charity. "When it happens," says he, "that you are employed in these offices, take care that sweetness of words be joined with the labour of your hands." It is not enough that you take care to do what is right and good; but you must also perform the good you do with a good grace, endeavouring that sweetness and meekness accompany your words, that others knowing you act with the spirit of charity, your service may thereby be more pleasing to them. "Let your discourse," says the apostle, "be always seasoned with a certain kind of salt that may render it agreeable, in such sort that you understand what answer to give every one;" and this salt is nothing else but the sweetness and gentleness of Christ. Though you should be so employed, that you are not able to perform what is asked of you, yet you must not upon this account rudely put off your brother; on the contrary, you should then hearken more mildly to his petition; you should signify

how glad you would be were it in your power to do what he desires, and that nothing but the pressing affairs you have in hand could hinder you from doing now, what you will joyfully do as soon as you are a little more at leisure. The venerable John Berchmans, from his very childhood, whenever a quarrel arose among his companions, had a great facility in quelling it, and making them friends again. And the reason of this was, because he was all sweetness, and always had recourse to prayers and entreaties.

The epistle which St. Bernard wrote to his nephew Robert in order to appease him and recall him to the Cistercian order, which he had deserted for Cluny, breathes from the beginning to the end a spirit of the finest gentleness and meekness. It runs thus: "Sufficient, and more than sufficient, time I have waited, my dearest son Robert, to observe whether the piety of God would vouchsafe to regard your soul, or mine through you,—yours by inspiring it with compunction, and mine by filling it with joy on your account; but since I have been frustrated hitherto in my hopes, I am no longer able to conceal my grief, to repress my anxiety, to dissemble my sadness. . . . . Alas! wretched me, that I should be deprived of you! that I should not see you! and that I should live without you! for whom to die would be to me to live; and without whom to live would be to die! I ask not, then, why you went away; but I complain that you do not return. Only come, and it shall be peace; return, and there will be full satisfaction. Certainly it was my fault that you departed; for I was too austere to a delicate youth, and too hardly did I treat a tender plant: for, as well as I can remember, this is what you used to

complain of. That shall not be imputed to you: I might, perhaps, offer some excuse for myself, and appeal to the scripture, which attests the necessity of discipline for youth; but it was, as I have said already, my fault that you departed; but henceforth it will begin to be also yours, if you do not spare the penitent, and grant indulgence to him who confesses; because, though I might have been indiscreet towards you, I could never have been malevolent; but if you fear my indiscretion for the future, you should know that I am no more what I was, than you are what you were. You being changed, shall find me changed. Do you wish to be free from all fault? return. If you acknowledge your fault, I pardon you. Do you also pardon me when I acknowledge mine. Fearlessly come whither humility calls you, whither charity draws you; you fled from one that was severe; return to one that is gentle. I have known your mind, that can be more easily moved by love than by fear; and if any one should wonder that a simple, modest, and timid boy should dare to desert his own, and his place, and his vow, against the will of his brethren and the command of his master, let him also wonder that David, and Solomon, and Sampson should have been betrayed into error. When man could be deceived so as to lose the country of felicity, why should it seem strange that a tender youth should be enticed from a place of horror and a vast solitude. A vain prudence represented holy discipline as indiscretion; and the credulous boy is tempted to follow the seducer; he is received with honours and preferred above his equals. But my dear little son, consult your own heart, because you know yourself better than another can know you. Ask yourself

why you departed? why you left your order, your brethren, your place, and me, who am nearer in flesh, and nearer in spirit? If it was that you might live in more perfection, be at rest, for then you have not looked back; glory with the apostle, and say that you have looked to the things before you, and to the palm of glory; but if otherwise, be not lifted up, but fear, since you have looked back, you have prevaricated, you have apostatized. And this I say, my son, not to confound you, but that I may admonish you as a dearest son; for if you have many teachers in Christ, yet you have not many fathers, for I have begotten you in religion, I have nourished you with milk as a little one, and I was about to feed you with bread if you had waited till you were grown up. You have been torn from me, but I can never forget you; not, indeed, bone of my bone, or flesh of my flesh, but the joy of my heart, the fruit of my spirit, the crown of my hope, and as I feel, the half of my soul."

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"A Superior should use meekness even in his corrections. It is one thing to reprove strongly, and another to reprove angrily. We should sometimes give a strong reproof when a fault is great, and when it has been repeated after due admonitions; but we should take care never to reprove bitterly in a passionate tone, because this would do more harm than good. This would be the angry zeal which St. James condemns. There are some who boast of keeping all their family in order by this means, and who say that it is thus they should be governed. But St. James says quite the contrary. If, on a rare occasion, it be necessary to speak with some severity in order to make a grievous crime felt, we should always, at the conclusion of the rebuke, add some kind words. We must heal wounds as the Samaritan did, with wine and oil. But as oil floats above all other liquors, so meekness should predominate in all our actions."—*St. Liguori.*

"Whoever holdeth an office of government is bound to withstand and to correct the faults of those who are dependent upon him; and even, when the occasion requires it, to oppose the sentiments of others, but always with gentleness and peace, especially when he has to deliver any truth which is repugnant to the corrupt disposition of man. On such occasions, it is necessary to temper what one has to say in the ardent fire of charity, so that all bitterness may be extracted; otherwise our words will rather resemble bitter herbs, more calculated to cause sickness than to give nourishment. There is nothing more bitter than the shell of a walnut, when it is green and unripe, and yet, when it is boiled, it becomes very sweet, and one of the most palatable things that can be tasted. So also rebuke, which of its own nature is so revolting, tempered in the fire of charity, and seasoned with sweetness, becomes even amiable and charming. And when truth uttered from the lips does not bring with it this seasoning, it is an evident sign that in the heart of him who speaks it there is not true charity."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The blessed Paul of the Cross was not blind to the failings of his subjects; and when necessary, he made use of fire to cure them. He knew, however,

how to do it with so great discretion and skill, that it was truly admirable. He never allowed himself to be carried away by passion; but with perfect control over himself, he discreetly mixed together wine and oil, severity and sweetness, and with wonderful simplicity and prudence so well combined rigour with mildness, that he usually obtained his desired object. He used words so full of kindness, that they manifested a heart full of true affection, and plainly showed the strong desire he had of the good of the person corrected; at the very time that he was obliged to use some degree of severity, he accompanied his words with great marks of charity, and thus gave evidence that he had no other aim than the spiritual advantage of his children.

It was his maxim, that reproofs given with sweetness cure and heal every wound; on the contrary, those given harshly, in place of curing the evil, make it worse; and so greatly had he at heart this maxim, that he desired that the exhortations given to a religious family should be made with all sweetness and mildness. "I have heard," he writes to a superior, "that your reverence, in the examinations and in the chapters, makes very strong exclamations, *as* if you were giving a mission to a parcel of whiskered and mustachioed gentry; but, dear father rector, why do you do so? I praise your zeal, and I know that it springs from a strong wish for observance; but the truth is, that our religious are very good, therefore there is no need of such exclamations. . . . Work with sweetness, speak with peace of mind, do not force your voice, and believe me that it will strike more, and will do more good, and the religious will be more satisfied."

We read the same of St. Vincent of Paul. When he was obliged to correct his religious, he did it with such moderation, and in so sweet and yet so effectual a manner, that he softened the hardest hearts, so that they could not resist the force of his gentleness. And he said, on one occasion, that during the whole course of his life, he had never reproved any one with harsh words excepting three times, when he thought he had reason for so doing; and yet afterwards he repented of it, for it did not succeed; whereas, on the other hand, with mildness he had always gained his point. And in order to make his reproofs productive of good, and to temper their severity, he made use of the following precautions. The first was, that in general, without great necessity, he never corrected any one at the time he committed a fault; but took some time to consider, in the holy presence of God, what would be the best mode of giving his advice, especially when the fault was of a grievous nature, and the person little disposed to listen to reproof; and when the proper moment arrived, he asked the offender, with great confidence and cordiality, whether he was willing to be admonished, adding that he felt himself to be the most imperfect and guilty of all. The second was, that he used to show affection towards him, and even praise him, where he had any ground for doing so; by which means he found a way opened for discovering to him, with all gentleness, his fault, pointing out the grievousness and the bad effects of it. Nevertheless, he excused and extenuated it, as far as he could, and then suggested the remedy for it; and in order to encourage him to apply it, he added, in his humility, that he also had need of it. The third was, when he had finished his reprehension, he encou-

raged the person, telling him that God had permitted his fall in order to humble him, and to give him occasion to apply with greater diligence to the acquirement of virtue. Oftentimes he winked at failings, as if he had scarcely noticed them. It was his opinion that the faulty person should not be admonished but at the seasonable moment, and that the first time it should be done with great benignity and sweetness; the second with somewhat of severity and gravity, though accompanied with affability and the application of sweet and affectionate remedies; but that the third time, zeal and firmness should be called in; signifying to the person a determination to use the utmost severity that was necessary.

The holy mother St. Jane Frances of Chantal, when she had to correct any of her nuns, or to impose a penance upon them, kept a special guard over what she said, so that not a word of harshness or contempt that could show the least shadow of resentment escaped her lips; but she accompanied the correction with such cordial compassion and tenderness, as served at once to reprove the fault and encourage the guilty person. Her whole object was to make the offender sensible of her fault, and thus enter into herself; and this she endeavoured to do in a manner so sweet and encouraging, and by expressions so insinuating, that it was scarcely possible to listen to her admonitions without being moved to compunction, or without deriving profit. And if any showed a headstrong spirit of resistance to her rebukes, it was admirable to observe the prayers and affectionate artifices which her charity and prudence suggested in order to conduct her into the right way.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"When we have to reply to anyone who has insulted us, we should be careful to do it always with meekness. A soft answer extinguishes the fire of wrath. If we feel ourselves angry, it is better for us to be silent, because we should speak amiss; when we become tranquil, we would see that all our words were culpable."—*St. Liguori.*

"Correction, when it proceeds from passion, is never so well received, though accompanied with reason, as when it proceeds from reason alone. The rational soul, being naturally subject to reason, never becomes subject to passion but by tyranny. Hence, when reason is accompanied with passion, it becomes odious, because it debases its just dominion by fellowship with tyranny. Princes honour and delight their subjects exceedingly, when they visit them with a train of peaceable attendants; but when they come with bands of soldiers, although it be for the general good, they grieve and injure them. For although they rigorously enforce the observance of military discipline among their soldiers, still they cannot prevent disorders, by which many suffer. In like manner, so long as reason reigns, and of itself inflicts punishment, or gives reproof, or administers correction, although it be with rigorous strictness, everyone approves and loves it; but where it associates itself with passion, anger, and rage, which St. Augustine calls the soldiers of reason, all fear rather than love it, and much trouble and suffering ensue."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Vincent of Paul, whenever he felt himself growing angry, immediately left off speaking, and took care to do nothing and to resolve upon nothing until he found the movements of his anger appeased; being wont to say, that actions performed in such a state of agitation are not directed by right reason, which is at that moment disturbed and obscured; and that even though they should seem to be good, yet can they never be perfect; and that on these occasions, in spite of all the

risings of anger, and even all the pretexts of zeal, by which one may imagine himself to be actuated, the only course is to make use of no other words but those which breathe sweetness and peace, in order to gain our neighbour to God. Moreover, this blessed man of God, as long as he felt any movement of indignation, used the utmost violence with himself to prevent any expression of what he felt to betray itself upon his countenance; and if ever there escaped him a word or a look that showed impatience or bitterness, he immediately begged pardon for it. One day, having spoken somewhat in a determined tone to a lay brother, who excused himself with various pretexts from getting ready an apartment for a stranger, in order that by the tone of his voice he might make the man know what his duty was; he felt afterwards grieved, and with great humility went to beg the brother's pardon, humbling himself before him and kissing his feet. And on another occasion, fearing lest he should have hurt a lay brother by having told him to keep patient, and to wait awhile before he settled the questions he had proposed to him, the blessed man would not go to say mass until he had begged his pardon.

The [redacted] bishop Palafox, when sometimes in reproving another he perceived in himself some slight movements of anger or of excessive zeal, immediately raised up his heart to God, beseeching him in these or similar words to preserve him from sin: "O Lord, govern my reason in this storm, and suffer me not in any thing to go contrary to Thy holy will." St. Gregory gives the following rule: "Whenever the passion of anger overtakes the soul, subdue thy mind and overcome thyself. Put off the thought of revenge to another

time, and when the mind shall have become tranquil, then think upon it if thou please; for anger and revenge must not precede but follow reason, that it may have a fellowship with justice." It is related of the glorious St. Ambrose, that after admitting again the Emperor Theodosius to the ecclesiastical communion from which he had been cut off for his excessive cruelty against the Thessalonians, the saint advised him to make a law that henceforward no sentence of death pronounced by him could be executed till after the lapse of thirty days from the time that it was issued.

Plutarch relates that a similar advice was given to Cæsar Augustus by Atenodorus, the philosopher. For the latter, being requested by the emperor to give him some advice which might be useful to him for the right government of his subjects, thus spoke to him: "When thou shalt be overtaken by anger, thou shalt not proceed to make any decree or issue any command without first repeating within thyself the twenty-four letters of the Greek alphabet."

As we must avoid correcting others when we feel agitated by angry feelings, so we must avoid it when we perceive that those whom we have to correct are so. "If the person whom we have to correct," says St. Liguori, "be in a passion or disturbed, we should defer the correction until he becomes more tranquil, for otherwise we should only irritate him more." St. John, canon regular, holding the office of prior in his convent, was one day much ill-treated by one of his religious, who uttered the most injurious and abusive language against him; and because the saint made no reply, another who was present said to him: "You might repress this insolence by a single word,

ordering him to go back to his cell." "No," replied the holy man; "when a house is on fire, would it be wise to add more fuel to the flames? This good brother is now burning with rage; if I were to rebuke him I should only increase his anger; by-and-by he will be a little cooler, then will be the proper time for correcting his fault."

Correction should, also, if we would render it profitable, be administered in a seasonable time. We read of Socrates, that dining one day with his friends, and happening in a large company to reprehend a little too sharply one of his guests, Plato, who was present, could not refrain from saying to him, "Would it not have been better for you to have deferred this reprehension to another time, and secretly to have told him of his fault?" "But would not you, also," replied Socrates, "have done much better to have told me of mine in private?" Thus, for want of discretion in choosing a proper time for correction, they reproached one another without any profit.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"Nothing is more powerful than meekness. For as fire is extinguished by water, so a mind inflated by anger is subdued by meekness. By meekness we practise and make known our virtue, and also cause the indignation of our brother to cease, and deliver his mind from perturbation." — *St. John Chrysostom.*

"Sometimes a single word is sufficient to appease a person infuriated with indignation; and on the other hand, a single word is capable of carrying desolation to a soul, and of causing bitterness, that may be most injurious."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

THE patriarch Jacob, when returning to his father's house, by humility and meekness not only succeeded in subduing his brother's anger, but also won his friendship. First he sent messengers to him, and commanded them, saying, "Thus shall ye speak to my lord Esau: Thus saith thy brother Jacob: I have sojourned with Laban, and have been with him until this day. I have oxen, and asses, and sheep, and men-servants and women-servants: and now I send a message to my lord, that I may find favour in thy sight." (a) . . . . . After this, when lifting up his eyes, Jacob saw Esau coming, and with him four hundred men, he divided the children of Lia, and of Rachel, and of the two handmaids. And he put both the handmaids and their children foremost: and Lia and her children in the second place: and Rachel and Joseph last. And he went forward and bowed his face to the ground seven times until his brother came near. Then Esau ran to meet his brother,

(a) Gen. xxxii. 4.

and embraced him, and clasping him fast about the neck, kissed him and wept.(a) Whilst St. Francis of Sales was engaged in the mission of Chablais, his enemies, irritated at the great good which he was performing, formed the design of assassinating him. This conspiracy, when it became known to his friends, filled them with terror. Some lamented him; others deliberated on the best means of preserving him from the fury of his enemies; but all appeared to think that, whatever precautions might be taken for his safety, the Calvinists would finally succeed in sacrificing him to their hatred.

Full of these melancholy reflections, they hastened to Francis, and apprised him of the danger to which he was exposed; but he spoke to them of the glory and happiness of martyrdom with so much energy and confidence in God, that he imparted to them a share of the consolations with which he was filled amidst the surrounding danger. He however accepted the offer, which some of them made to him, of their company. They departed together, but scarcely had they entered the wood through which they must pass, when two assassins started from a bush, where they had lain concealed, and presented themselves before Francis with drawn swords. In this extremity of danger, Francis preserved his usual presence of mind; he forbade his attendants to make use of their defensive weapons, and, advancing towards the assassins with that air of tranquillity and meekness which never left him, he said to them, "My friends, there is apparently some mistake in this business; you certainly do not direct any attempt against a man who, so far from

(b) Gen. xxxiii. 1-4.

offending you, would willingly sacrifice his life to save you." These few words calmed in a moment the rage of these furious zealots; they remained motionless for some time, then, casting themselves at his feet, they asked his pardon, and made the most solemn protestations that no person in future should be more devoted to his service, or more disposed to follow him in all danger. Francis raised them up, pardoned them, embraced them with tenderness, and advised them to retire, in order to avoid the search of the governor, who would not show them the same indulgence, should they fall into his hands.

A similar fact is recorded in the life of St. Francis of Assisi. When this saint settled himself on Mount Alvernia with some of his brethren, to lead a life of penance and contemplation far from all worldly noise, it happened that a celebrated brigand, called the Wolf, on account of his plundering and murderous deeds, had fixed his stronghold amongst the masses of the rocky mount at a short distance from them. The establishment of Francis and his brethren displeased him greatly. He gave them notice several times to be gone, and threatened them with vengeance should they not obey. Their great poverty gave them nothing to fear from thieves, but there was just cause to fear a massacre. Divine Providence, however, saved them by a change which might well be called the work of the Most High. The villain came one day, determined upon expelling them, and used the most atrocious language to them. Francis received him with so much mildness, listened to him with so much patience, that by degrees he induced him to hear reason, so that his anger was entirely dispelled, and he not only consented to their re-

maining, but he begged that they would admit him into their poor dwelling. He witnessed, during several days, their angelic mode of life, and became in consequence so changed, that he determined upon adopting a similar life. The saint, perceiving that from a ravenous wolf he was become a gentle lamb, gave him the habit of the order, with the name of Brother *Agnello*, or Brother-lamb, under which he expiated his crimes by religious penance.

As three monks were once making a journey, they lost their way, and on that account were obliged to pass over a corn-field, in order to avoid making a long circuit. A countryman happening to see them, shouted to them, and told them they were false monks: upon which the eldest said to his two companions, "Make no reply." Then, going forwards himself to the peasant, he said to him, "My son, you have told the truth;" but the latter continuing to abuse and upbraid him, the good man repeated, "What you say is true, my son, for if we were true monks we should not have done you this injury: now then pardon us, for the love of God, for we acknowledge we have done wrong." At these words, the countryman was so much struck with admiration of the great mildness of the monks, that he threw himself at their feet, kissed their habit, and went along with them himself to show them the way.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"If any man have not the care of his own, and especially those of his own house, he hath denied the faith and is worse than an infidel." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Let us force ourselves to be affectionate, gentle, and humble, in our intercourse with all, especially with those whom God has given us as our companions, such, for instance, as those of our household. And never let us consent to be of the number of those who, out of their own house, appear like angels, but are more like devils at home."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Liguori distinguished himself particularly in this point. His meekness towards those of his household was really admirable. When they annoyed him in any way, his greatest complaint was to say, "How foolish you are!" or else, "May you become a saint!" If the matter were one of consequence, and he saw no way of remedying it, he raised his eyes to Heaven, and gently murmured, "God's will be done;" and if he could not control some emotion, he used to exclaim "Gloria Patri," &c.

St. Francis of Sales, far from assuming over servants an air of imperiousness, treated them with much affection and gentleness, and always courteously returned their salutations. He was most discreet in the orders he gave them, sparing them trouble to the utmost of his power. When he was obliged to reprove them, he did so, but with such benignity and gentleness, that they were filled with confusion, and could not help mending their faults. The following fact may serve as an exam-

(a) 1 Tim. iv. 8.

ple of what has just been said. He had been engaged for a considerable time in conversing with a certain nobleman on some important business; the evening had closed in, and the servants, one trusting to another, had gone away, so that he was left without any attendants in the ante-room, and without the means of getting a candle; hence, when the nobleman took his leave, the holy bishop had to lead him by the hand in the dark, feeling his way through a long gallery and several other apartments to the door, where he found the servants amusing themselves. As soon as he had wished the nobleman a good night, he said to the butler, in the quietest way possible, "It was a pity you did not bring the candles this evening at the proper time;"—and this was all the remark he made upon their negligence. This was the way the holy prelate always made his rebukes, so that his intimate friend, the bishop of Belley, declared there never was a more indulgent master, nor one more beloved by his servants.

We also read that the holy mother St. Jane Frances de Chantal always, even long before her entrance into the religious state, was all tenderness, compassion, and condescension towards her servants. She never scolded or upbraided them, as too many do, but endured their little failings with great patience and forbearance, sparing no pains to assist them to overcome their faults, by the utmost sweetness of demeanour and gentleness of advice, until God gave her the consolation to see them corrected. And one proof of how well she succeeded was, that from the time of her marriage, she never was obliged to dismiss from her household but two servants, who were indeed altogether incorrigible; all the rest stayed in her service as long as they

pleased, and were always treated with the greatest care and affection, and provided with everything they could want.

This spirit of gentleness and meekness towards those with whom we live is especially required in religious, who ought to be united together by the bond of perfect charity. For this purpose we ought, in the first place, take great care to follow with perfection the advice which St. Paul gives to Timothy, "not to dispute or contend in words, for it serves for nothing else but to subvert and give scandal to the hearers." "A servant of God," he adds, "must not be contentious, but mild and sweet towards all men, and patient and apt to learn." (a) All the saints recommend the same thing, and St. Ignatius, in particular, very much insists on this point in his rules. St. Dorotheus says, that he had rather things should be left undone, than perceive any disputes or contests amongst brethren whilst doing them; and adds, that should he repeat this sentiment a thousand times, he should not repeat it too often.

In the second place, we ought to be very careful lest we utter any word which may be offensive to our brethren. There are some religious who allow themselves to speak sharply to their brethren, because they know their virtue, and that they will not be scandalized or offended by them. But for all this, they will not be blameless before God. For it is very wrong to take occasion, from our brother's moderation, to treat him ill. It is true that we ought to have a good opinion of our brethren, and not believe they are so alive to resentment as to be angry at any small matter; but

(a) 2 Tim. ii. 14, 24.

still we are bound to converse with them with as much caution and circumspection as if we knew they were very sensible to the least thing,—we ought to be as tender of them as if they were more brittle than glass; in a word, be their temper and feelings what they may, we must most scrupulously abstain from giving any cause whatsoever of offence. It is to this we should apply ourselves, as well upon our own as upon our brother's account; because the wisdom of our neighbour excuses not our indiscretion, and because all are not, or at least all are not *always* disposed to take things in the best part, and to overlook offences of this sort which are given them.

Besides avoiding saying anything which may offend our brethren, we must, moreover, in treating with them, unite great sweetness of words with the work of our hands. It is this that the wise man counsels us when he says, "Son, make no complaint whilst you do that which is good; and whensoever you give anything, mortify none with harsh words. The dew tempers the day's great heat, and a sweet word excels whatever you can give; it is above all other presents." (*) The agreeable manner with which you serve another, and the sweetness with which you answer him, is more regarded and esteemed than all you do; and, on the contrary, what pain soever you take, know that, if you appear not to take it with a good will, if you perform not your actions with a good grace, and if your words be not always accompanied with sweetness, all will be esteemed as nothing, and you will have laboured in vain.

Lastly, we must beware that we do not take

(*) Eccl. xviii. 15.

offence, or give way to irritation and the spirit of revenge, when it happens that our brethren treat us sharply or do anything against us. St. Dorotheus teaches us a beautiful manner of answering on such occasions. He says, that when anyone speaks sharply to us, or reprehends us for any fault, or reproaches us for what we have not been guilty of, we must always receive the correction with equal humility, and say, whether we have done wrong or not, "Dear brother, pardon me, and pray for me." He learned this doctrine from an ancient father, who was wont to practise it himself and to recommend it to others.

We must ever bear in mind that we are all brothers, members of the same body; and it was never heard that one member, injured by another, ever meditated revenge. Let us not then be less wise, as members of Christ; but when anyone has offended us, let us say to ourselves, he is a member of the same body with myself, wherefore I will pardon him in meekness; there is mischief enough done already, and therefore I will not be the occasion of doing more; but I will follow St. Paul's counsel, which says, "Let us not render any one evil for evil." (a)

(a) Rom. xii. 17.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"If it be possible, as much as is in you, have peace with all men. Revenge not yourselves, my dearly beloved; but give place unto wrath, for it is written, *Revenge to me: I will repay*, saith the Lord. But if thy enemy be hungry, give him to eat: if he thirst, give him to drink, for, doing this, thou shalt heap coals of fire upon his head. Be not overcome by evil, but overcome evil by good." (*)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Above all things we should be meek towards our enemies. We must overcome hatred by love, and persecution by meekness. It was thus the saints acted, and in this manner they conciliated the regard of their bitterest enemies."—*St. Liguori.*

MEEKNESS and benignity towards our enemies is a noble Christian virtue; and our blessed Saviour, enjoins its practice, to his disciples especially, in His sermon on the mount: "I say to you," says He, "not to resist evil: but if one strike thee on thy right cheek, turn to him also the other: and if a man will contend with thee in judgment, and take away thy coat, let go thy cloak also to him. And whosoever will force thee one mile, go with him other two. Give to him that asketh of thee, and from him that would borrow of thee turn not away. . . . I say to you, love your enemies, do good to them that hate you; and pray for them that persecute and calumniate you; that you may be the children of your Father who is in heaven, who maketh His sun to rise upon the good and bad, and raineth upon the just and the unjust. For if you love them that love you, what reward shall you have? Do not even the publicans this?

(*) Rom. xii. 18-21.

And if you salute your brethren only, what do you more? do not also the heathens this? Be you therefore perfect, as also your heavenly Father is perfect."(a)

The lesson contained in these words breathes an air of heavenly wisdom unheard amongst the children of men; a wisdom so divine, that He alone was able to reveal it to man, Who, being from all eternity in the bosom of God, appeared amongst us, in the glory of the only begotten of the Father, full of grace and truth.

This sublime lesson contains a command as well as a counsel. The command regards the disposition of our mind, which, besides being free from all feeling of hatred and revenge, must forgive past offences, and must also be prepared to encounter and endure patiently new ones, when God's glory and our neighbour's welfare require it. The sincerity of this disposition is proved and made known, not by mere words, but by Christian deeds. The counsel consists in attaining to such a degree of meekness as joyfully to bear injuries, and willingly to encounter new ones for the love of God, even when we are not bound to do so from motives of religion or charity.

Such was the meekness which shone conspicuously in the lives of the saints, and which we are called upon and urged to imitate by their teaching and example. Nothing is more like God in nature than a man who is placable and benign to his enemies; for God loved us whilst we were His enemies, and not only loved us, but chose to die for us. "All men are your friends," said the seraphic father to his friars, "and no one is to be called

(a) Matt. v.

an enemy; for they who are angry with you, and who persecute you, confer a greater benefit on your souls than any you could receive from the kindest friend. All men, therefore, confer favours on you; and except yourselves, you can have no enemy." "A merchant," says St. Bernardine of Sienna, "acts advisedly who sells his wares to the highest bidder, and you will receive a greater reward by showing mercy to your enemy than to your friend."

The reply of Sir Thomas More to the men who condemned him to death is truly admirable: "As St. Paul," said he, "had part in the death of St. Stephen, and both are in heaven, so can you, my judges, and I be equally saved by the mercy of the Lord."

St. Elphage, archbishop of Canterbury, on refusing to redeem himself by the property of the church, the patrimony of the poor, was martyred by the Danes, who rushed upon him with sudden fury, and struck him with their swords to the earth, while others advancing threw a shower of stones upon him. In his last agony he had strength enough to utter a prayer for himself and his murderers: "Lord Jesus, son of the most high God, who came through the Virgin's womb to save sinners, receive me and have mercy on them."

The holy man St. Becchaire, in the seventh century, was assassinated by a wretch whom he had befriended from youth. The saint had retired after mass to take a little rest, when the murderer fell upon him with a knife, and after giving him many wounds, fled; but he was taken by some of the monks, and brought back to the place where St. Becchaire lay. The holy man, remembering the words of Jesus upon the cross, said to him with his last breath, "My son, appease the anger of

God by a long penitence; for my part, I freely forgive you; but go to Rome, my child, to receive pardon for what you have done from the holy father, who has power to grant you absolution."

St. Francis Regis, being struck by a certain libertine, fulfilled to the very letter the precept of our Lord, and presented him the other cheek, saying meekly, "My brother, if you knew me, you would judge that I merit worse treatment."

A Spanish ecclesiastic published a bitter pasquinade against Pope Pius V., and the magistrates had condemned him to the penalty which the law awarded; but this holy pontiff sent for the prisoner, and gave him full pardon, adding, "My friend, when you observe, in future, any defect in my conduct, I pray you to warn me of it, that I may correct myself."

Urban IV., to whom the church is indebted for the great festival of the adorable Eucharist, had occasion to evince the same spirit. Having been sent, while only archdeacon of Liege, from Lyons into Germany, by Pope Innocent IV., he was violently seized by three gentlemen of the diocese of Treves, who threw him into prison, and took possession of his horses, money, and other effects. When elevated to the chair of St. Peter, he received a petition from these men, offering to make restitution, but desiring to be dispensed from going in person to Rome to receive absolution, on the plea of the perils of the journey. Urban IV. immediately gave commission to the prior of the Dominicans at Coblentz to absolve them, and charged him to say that he freely forgave them both the insult and the injury, only enjoining on them to refrain in future from similar acts.

When St. Adalhard, after seven years' banish-

ment, was restored to favour by the emperor, and recalled to court, on entering the palace he beheld the nobles, who were his enemies, confused, and evincing marks of shame for what they had done against him; but he prevented their asking forgiveness, and with downcast eyes thus sweetly spoke: "Emperor and princes, nothing happens in the world without the judgment of God. If God hath punished us for our sins, why should that affect you? We ourselves must see to it. You could have done nothing without God's permission. Let us now only obey His orders: forgive, and you shall be forgiven; which I do first, and do you follow me." Then all embraced him, and the man of God proceeded to his monastery, which he had never hoped to see again.

Of St. Vincent of Paul it is related, that once a furious man, under the plea that the saint had jostled him in passing, gave him a blow, adding, by the blackest calumny, that he was the cause of the taxes with which the people were loaded. Vincent, instead of having him arrested, as he might have done, went on his knees before him, offered to him his other cheek, and publicly confessed that he was a great sinner, and asked pardon of that man for any cause he might have given him for such treatment. The profound humility of the venerable priest touched the heart of the offender. He came the next day to offer, in his turn, the most humble apology to the servant of God. Vincent received him as a good friend, begged him to spend seven or eight days with him, and profited by the time to engage him in a spiritual retreat; and having gained him to himself by his meekness, he afterwards gained him to God.

Still more wonderful is what we read of St.

Godoleff, a martyr of the eleventh century, who was most conspicuous for her patience and sweetness towards her fiercest enemies. Although possessing great personal attractions, she was scarcely married to Bertulf, a Flemish gentleman, than she became the victim of barbarous ill usage, both from him and his kindred. In consequence of his sudden dislike, she was made a prisoner in his house. She was debarred from all food except bread and water, cursed, insulted, and beaten; but so far from a murmur escaping her lips, her pillow by night and her face by day were bedewed with tears for his sake. For his conversion she hourly offered prayers to heaven; nor did once a hint of the barbarity she experienced reach her own family till she was expelled from his roof, and forced to look there for support. The bishop, being apprised of the fact, compelled the husband to receive her back, and promise amendment; but immediately on her return he meditated her death. Finding starvation not quick enough for his impatience, he directed his confidential domestics to strangle her. At midnight she was called up by the murderers; and as she left her chamber in obedience, as she supposed, to her husband's commands, she was strangled, and quietly laid on her bed; the next morning she was found dead, and a report was spread that she had destroyed herself. Thus the meek and patient Godoleff, who during life ever returned good for evil, ever devoutly prayed for her enemies, ever wore a smiling countenance amidst the most dreadful privations and sufferings, died a victim of the most barbarous cruelty; but her death was but a beginning of a better life—of a glorious and eternal life—which the Lord Jesus never fails to impart to the meek and humble of heart.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"We should also use meekness towards ourselves when we have committed a fault. To be in a passion with ourselves after a fault, is not humility, but pride; it is refusing to acknowledge that we are weak and miserable creatures. St. Teresa said, that all humility which disturbs the soul does not proceed from God, but the devil. To be angry with ourselves, after the commission of sin, is a greater fault than the former,—a fault which brings many others in its train; such as the omission of our usual devotions, of prayer, of communion, or the imperfect performance of them. St. Aloysius Gonzaga said, that the devil fishes in troubled waters. When the soul is in trouble, it has but a weak knowledge of God and of its duty. When we have committed a fault, let us address God with humility and confidence, and ask His pardon; saying to Him, with St. Catharine of Genoa, 'O Lord, these are the fruits of my garden. I love Thee with my whole heart. I have offended Thee; I am sorry for it, and will never do so again. Grant me Thy holy grace.'" —*St. Liguori.*

"When you behold your own defects, you should feel sorry for them; but that sorrow should be humble, tranquil, and peaceful, and never anxious, impatient, or morose, for that would do more harm than good. . . . . Know, and be assured, that all those thoughts that cause in us disquietude and agitation of mind, come not from God, who is the Prince of Peace, but proceed either from the devil, or from our self-love, and the esteem which we bear to ourselves, which are the three sources whence whatever makes us lose our peace of mind springs. Therefore, whenever thoughts of this nature trouble us, we ought to reject them immediately, and despise them."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THIS saint, who, by reason of his heroic humility and meekness, might have said to Christians, "Be imitators of me as I am of Christ. Learn of me, because I am meek and humble of heart," frequently repeats this sublime lesson concerning the practice of meekness towards ourselves in his writings. In the "Introduction to a Devout Life"

he writes thus: "One of the best exercises of meekness is that which we practise towards ourselves, in not being vexed or impatient with ourselves on account of our imperfections; for although it is reasonable to be truly sorry when we commit faults, it is not reasonable to be churlish, dejected, snappish, and choleric on such occasions. Many fail in this point, who, if they fall into anger, become pettish and vexed with themselves for being angry, and thus add fuel to the fire already enkindled in their hearts. This indignation against themselves, far from extinguishing their anger, does but dispose them to become still more angry. Besides, this pettishness or vexation against ourselves tends only to pride, and arises from self-love, which is disquieted and troubled that we should be so imperfect. Our sorrow for our faults should have two qualities, tranquillity and firmness. Does not a judge, when calm and reasonable, pass a more just sentence on a criminal than when he is impetuous and passionate? And shall not we correct ourselves better by a calm and reasonable repentance than by harshness, violence, and passion? Intemperate and angry repentance often corresponds not to the grievousness of our faults, but to our own particular inclinations. For example: one who has a great love for chastity, if he commit the slightest fault against this virtue distresses himself beyond measure, while perhaps he makes light of some grievous sin of detraction. On the other hand, one who hates detraction, torments himself if he let slip the slightest word against charity, and makes no account of a serious fault against chastity. Whence is this, but because such persons regulate their consciences, not by reason, but by inclination?

"Be assured, that as the mild and affectionate remonstrance of a father is much more effectual in correcting his child than anger and rage would be; so when we commit a fault, if we reprove and remonstrate with ourselves mildly and calmly, and with more compassion than anger, and encourage ourselves to amendment for the future, the sorrow which we conceive sinks deeper, penetrates more effectually into our souls, and contributes more to amendment than any sorrow that could arise from fretfulness or violent indignation.

"For example, had I made a resolution to guard particularly against all sins of vanity, and yet had committed a grievous sin of this kind, I would not reproach myself, saying, 'Art thou not a miserable and abominable wretch for having, after so many resolutions, suffered thyself to be carried away with vanity? Die with shame, lift not up thine eyes to heaven, thou blind, impudent traitor, thou rebel against God.' But I would correct myself rationally and compassionately, thus: 'Alas! my poor soul, behold we have fallen into the very snare which we had so firmly resolved to avoid! But come, let us arise and extricate ourselves; let us implore God's mercy; let us hope that, for the time to come, He will strengthen us by His grace, and make us more constant, and let us enter again the way of humility. Let us take courage, and from this day forward be more upon our guard: God will help us, and we shall do better.' Upon such reprehension I would found a most firm resolution of never more relapsing into the same fault, and adopt the necessary means to keep it, particularly the advice of my director.

"But should any one find that his heart is not sufficiently moved by such mildness, he may employ

reproach, or a more sharp and severe style of reprehension, in order to excite himself to a deeper sense of confusion, provided that, after having proceeded thus, he endeavours to console himself with holy and sweet confidence in God; after the example of that great penitent who, when his soul was afflicted, consoled himself, exclaiming, 'Why art thou sad, O my soul, and why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God, for I will still give praise to Him, who is the salvation of my countenance and my God.'(a)

"Arise, then, when you have fallen; but in all tranquillity of mind and heart, profoundly humbling yourself before God at the sight of your misery, without being at all surprised at your fall; for it is no wonder that infirmity should be infirm, weakness weak, and misery wretched. Still detest, with your whole soul, your offence against God, and with courage and confidence in His mercy, return again to the ways of virtue."

St. Aloysius Gonzaga never desponded when he committed a fault, but entered into himself and said: "Terra dedit fructum suum;" signifying that it is natural to this corruptible body, which aggravates the soul to fall into sin.

(a) Ps. xliii. 5.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"Humble gentleness is a favourite virtue, which our Lord so much recommends, that we ought to practise it through all times and circumstances. It is our duty to avoid evil, but we must do so peacefully. It is our duty to do good, but it must be done with tranquillity. Take this as your rule: do what you can for your neighbour from a motive of love; and what you cannot do without a dispute, leave undone. Peace and tranquillity of heart should be on the surface of all our actions, as constantly as the oil of the olive rises to the top of every other liquor."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"When anything hard and painful happens to thee, and thy soul feels provoked to anger and rage, call to mind the meekness of Christ, and thou wilt soon become meek and benign."—*St. John Chrysostom.*

Blosius relates, that our blessed Saviour appearing to St. Bridget, thus spoke to her: "I, thy Creator and Spouse, have borne stripes; and thou wast so impatient that thou wouldst not bear words. I, whilst standing before the judge, have kept silence, and did not open my mouth; and thou, by sharply answering and reproving, hast raised high thy voice. Thou oughtest to have borne patiently all things for me, who have been nailed to the cross for thy sake." By this our blessed Lord would teach her that one great means of overcoming anger and practising meekness in the troublesome accidents of life is the consideration of His patience and meekness.

St. John Chrysostom, commenting on these words of St. Paul to the Corinthians, "I beseech you, through the mildness and modesty of Christ," very properly remarks, that the apostle does not exhort us to the practice of meekness by the exam-

ple of the angels and archangels, although these are naturally very mild and meek, but by the example of an incarnate God; that, animated by the consideration of the immense glory which accrues to us from resembling the King of Glory, we may apply ourselves earnestly to subdue our angry feelings, and to receive with moderation and tranquillity of mind all injuries, ignominies, and wrongs which we may encounter during our mortal life. "Do you see," says he, "who is the meek? whose imitator is He? He is not the imitator of angels, nor of archangels, though they are most mild and full of every virtue, but of the Lord of the universe. Paul would have us to imitate the meekness of God, that by exhibiting to us his dignity, we might be convinced that all who suffer contempt, bear contumely, or endure any other evil with mildness, controlling their anger, are imitators of God."([a])

A little after, the holy father adds, that although Christians must be endowed with every virtue, yet they must especially distinguish themselves by their meekness, because those only who are adorned with this virtue are called imitators of Christ. "Though many virtues," says he, "become Christian men, meekness does so especially, for Christ calls those only who are conspicuous in this virtue imitators of God."

The saints, deeply impressed with this truth, evinced an heroic meekness under the most humiliating and severe trials. Once, when St. Ignatius was travelling from Ferrara to Geneva, the whole of Lombardy being overrun by soldiers, from the war with France, he fell in with a party who were

([a]) Serm. de Mansuet.

patrolling the road. In those suspicious and perilous times he was believed to be a spy, and was accordingly made prisoner, and conducted to a small hut close by. They asked him who he was, whither he was going, and what message he was charged with. They also stripped all his rags from his body, and took off his shoes to see if they could find any letters. Not being able to gain any information, either from their search or from their questions, yet believing, nevertheless, that he had cheated them by his cunning, they brought him to the governor of the fortress. The saint went along rejoicing, remembering how his Lord had been shamefully dragged through the public streets of Jerusalem, amidst the mockery and abuse of the people. When the commander asked him his name and residence, he answered him nothing; and to the number of different questions which succeeded, he either made no reply or else answered very briefly. The captain, taking him for a fool or a madman, turned angrily to the soldiers, saying, "Why have you brought before me such a man as this? Cannot you distinguish a fool from a spy? Take him at once out of the fortress." The soldiers, exasperated at these words, wreaked their vengeance on Ignatius, beating and kicking him, all which ill-treatment he bore with admirable meekness, having his mind fixed on our Saviour scourged at the pillar.

St. Joseph Calassanctius was animated by the same spirit. Scarcely had the servant of God laid the foundation of his Institute, than such a tempest was raised against him as would have terrified any heart less magnanimous than his. Rebuffs, indignation, and threats, opened the infernal persecution; these were followed by insults, ill-treatment,

and affronts, not private only, but even in public; not for a short time, but persisted in for many years with unexampled obstinacy. The zeal, however, of the pious founder was neither checked nor slackened by all this; strengthened by the consideration of the invincible patience and meekness of his Saviour, he persevered, he endured all, till at length he attained the crown promised to the meek and humble of heart.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"There are two methods to subdue anger. The first is, that before a person undertakes to act, he places before his mind the contumelies and sufferings which he will likely encounter, and by reflecting on the shame borne by our Saviour, prepare himself to bear them patiently. The second is, that when we behold the excesses of others, we direct our thoughts to our own excesses, by which we offend others. This consideration of our own faults will lead us to excuse those of others. For a person who piously considers that he also has something which others must bear patiently in him, will be easily disposed to bear patiently injuries received from others."—*St. Gregory.*

"As it is not possible in this our pilgrimage to avoid certain differences and disputes between one another, in order to preserve peace of heart we should have a great fund of mildness to oppose to the sudden movements of anger. . . . . Accustom your heart to be teachable, manageable, submissive, and easy to condescend in all lawful things, for the love of your most sweet God, so as to resemble the innocent dove, whose bright plumage imbibes all the rays of the sun. To this end, every morning put your soul in a posture of humility, of tranquillity, and of sweetness, and every now and then during the day, consider whether you have been over eager in any matter, and if so, immediately try to restore the calm."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Gregory says that a person who is abruptly overtaken by troubles and injuries, without first foreseeing and being ready for them, is like a soldier who is attacked by the enemy whilst asleep, so that, making no resistance on his part, he is easily overcome and destroyed by the enemy. On the contrary, he who premeditates on the wrongs and injuries which he may be likely to encounter, is like a watchful soldier, who, sword in hand, is always ready to engage in battle and to meet the enemy. The practice which the holy doctor here recommends will be found most profitable in our

morning exercises. Before we enter into the distracting business of the day, let us enter into ourselves, and place before our minds the troubles, the injuries, the humiliations, which are likely to befal us during the day. At the same time let us fix our mind upon our Saviour, overwhelmed with contumelies and sufferings, and meditate on the heroic patience and meekness with which he bore all for our sakes. Then let us offer ourselves to God, ready to endure, patiently and meekly, all that may befal us during the day. When trial comes, we may say with St. Basil, "Hast thou been struck with blows? Has any one spat in thy face? The Lord also endured the same. Dost thou suffer from calumny? The Lord also suffered from it. Is thy garment torn? The Lord also was violently stripped of his clothes, and lots were cast upon them. Thou hast not as yet been condemned to death, nor hast thou as yet been nailed to the cross."

St. Francis of Sales lays great stress upon this method of arming ourselves against the passion of anger, and recommends it in a particular manner to all devout souls. "When your mind is most tranquil," says he, "and free from all irritation, lay in a plentiful store of meekness and kindness, so as to be able to utter all your words and perform all your actions, great and little, in the mildest manner possible. Remember that the Spouse in the Canticles has honey not only on her lips and on the tip of her tongue, but under her tongue, that is, in her heart; and not only honey, but milk also: and learn hence, that our meekness should not only appear in our words, but really reside in our hearts, and that we must not only have the aromatic and fragrant sweetness of honey, that is,

suavity of words and manners towards strangers, but also the mildness of milk towards our domestics, friends, and neighbours. It is the want of this which makes so many persons, who are angels abroad, demons at home."

In another place he suggests the following remedies against the vice of anger:—"1. Prevent the first movements of it, if it be in your power; if not, at least reject them immediately, as soon as you perceive them, by turning your mind to something else. 2. In imitation of the Apostles, during the storm on the sea of Galilee, have recourse to God, to whom it belongs to restore a calm to a troubled heart. 3. While excitement lasts, neither say nor do anything in reference to that which was the cause of the excitement. 4. Force yourself to practise acts of mildness and humility towards the person against whom you feel exasperated, especially if he has been betrayed into any act of resentment."

This great servant of God was often tormented and vexed by certain individuals, who used injurious and abusive language in order to provoke him; and on those occasions, in order not to give way to anger, he had recourse to various devices: at one time he would reflect on some good quality of theirs, in order to excite himself to love them; at another he would treat them in the most gentle and courteous manner, to appease them, and if that did not succeed, he let them say what they would and kept silence. And on one occasion of this kind, when a man had behaved ill to him, he remarked to a nobleman, who was astonished at his heroic patience, "I have made an agreement with my tongue, that when another says anything to provoke me, I should remain perfectly silent."

St. Vincent of Paul was naturally a man of quick and fiery temper, and consequently very prone to anger, as he himself acknowledged to an intimate friend. But perceiving this, he strove with all his might to repress the ebullitions of nature, and, by means of prayer and constant labour, such a change was wrought in him, that he seemed no longer to feel any movement of anger, and was as though he had put off his very nature, becoming such a pattern of sweetness, gentleness, and mildness, as to conciliate the affection of all who knew him.

THIRTIETH DAY.

"The meek is he who can bear injuries, when done to himself, and avert them from others, to whom he is always ready to afford his help. He who is not so disposed is not mild and meek, but dull and stupid, and sleepy, and little better than a corpse." (a)—*St. John Chrysostom.*

"It is not strange for those who practise meekness to feel sometimes within themselves a holy indignation. This is proved by the example of Moses, who, although the meekest of men, yet, when circumstances required it, had his indignation exceedingly kindled." (b)—*St. Basil.*

This indignation, which even the meekest among the saints have occasionally experienced, is a holy zeal produced in the soul by the spirit of God, and has for its object God's honour and glory, and our neighbour's eternal welfare. Thus Moses, when returning from the Mount, carrying the tables of

(a) In Ps. cxxxi. (b) In Const. Mon. c. 15.

the law which he had received from God, on coming nigh the camp, and seeing the golden calf, and the dances of the people, "being very angry, threw the tables out of his hand, and broke them at the foot of the Mount: then laying hold of the calf which they had made, he burnt it, and beat it into powder, and mingled the dust of it in water, which he gave to the children of Israel to drink." (a) Holy David was inflamed with a like zeal when he said, "The zeal of Thy house hath eaten me up." (b) "My zeal hath made me pine away, because my enemies forgot Thy words." (c) Such zeal also animated Saul, when he heard that the Ammonites asked to pluck out the right eyes of the men of Jabes: "The spirit of the Lord came upon Saul," says the Scripture, "and his indignation was exceedingly kindled." (d) Such, again, was that which inflamed the heart of the Prophet Elias, when he said to God: "With zeal have I been zealous for the Lord God of hosts, because the children of Israel have forsaken Thy covenant, and they destroyed Thy altars, they have slain Thy prophets with the sword, and I alone am left, and they seek my life to take it away. (e) This holy indignation, directed by reason, and produced by the spirit of God, existed in perfection in the pattern of all sanctity, our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ. His burning zeal when He expelled from the temple the profaners of that holy place, and His severe invectives against Pharasaical hypocrisy, are proofs of it.

St. Gregory, treating of this holy indignation

(a) Exod. xxxii. 19, 20.
(b) Ps. lxviii. 10.
(c) Ps. cxviii. 139.
(d) 1 Kings xi. 6.
(e) 3 Kings xix. 10.

which adorned the saints of God, and goes together with the meekness of Christ, writes thus: "The Pontiff Heli, because he had not this anger, provoked the Divine vengeance against himself. For in proportion as he was tepid and slothful concerning the vices of his subjects, the anger of the eternal Judge was enkindled against him. Of this anger the Prophet says, '*Be angry and sin not.*' Which words those do not understand rightly who allow us to be angry against our own, but not against our neighbours' faults. For if we are bound to love our neighbours as ourselves, it follows that we may be angry with their vices no less than with our own."(a)

This is the reason why the saints, even those who were most conspicuous for their meekness, when the glory of God and the salvation of souls required it, appeared full of fire, and evinced the greatest firmness and fortitude. A bright pattern of this was St. Ignatius of Loyola, as we learn from the course which he pursued in governing his Society, especially as regards the dismissal of bad or unfit subjects. He considered this dismissal as one of the means provided by God for the preservation of the society, and he used therefore to exercise this means without ever allowing himself to be constrained by what he used to call imprudent charity. And when some would intercede with him in behalf of one whom he was about to expel, he used to say, "Would you have received him as a member if you had known what he was? Certainly not: allow me then to send him away; those who are accepted must be proved, and dismissed if they do not abide the proof." Then he

(a) Moral, lib. v. cap. 39.

added, "I will leave it to you to accept subjects, do you leave it to me to dismiss them." It was his wish that the chastity of his children should approach as nearly as possible to angelic purity, and he never endured any offence against this virtue. Once he dismissed nine together on this ground, though their faults seemed trifling, and although some of them were of noble birth, and others good Greek and Latin scholars. Another fault he could not bear amongst his subjects was obstinacy and uncharitableness. Francesco Marino, a very learned man, and of great skill in temporal affairs, being made minister of the house of the professed in Rome, showed himself very harsh and obstinate in his opinions. Ignatius removed him from his office, and put him into retreat, to see if this fault could be corrected; but he profited nothing, and the words of Girolamo Natali were fulfilled, who said that he feared he would bring disgrace on the spiritual exercises, and that their virtue would be rendered vain. On returning to his office he returned to his former habits. When this was reported to Ignatius, he made him rise from his bed in the middle of the night, and would not listen to his prayers that he might remain at least till the morning, thus giving a practical exhibition of what he had threatened, that he would not suffer an obstinate person to remain under the roof a single night.

Another point on which he evinced great strictness was holy obedience. When he heard that there were some of the Society in Portugal who were disinclined to obey, he sent a severe reproof to the Provincial for his ill-advised charity in tolerating this scandal, and gave general commands to him and all others in authority, that in virtue

of the obedience they owed him, they should expel from the order, without further delay, all who were rebellious, disobedient, and turbulent. On the receipt of this general order, one of the rectors, who had only fifteen subjects, sent away more than half of them. The good father was afterwards afraid that he had done wrong, and wrote to Ignatius, confessing the fault, and begging pardon; but, instead of blaming him, the saint commended him for his firmness, and told him that, if those who remained were unworthy, he was to expel them also, even should he be the only one remaining. Ignatius afterwards proposed this conduct as an example for other Superiors. "How much better is it," he wrote, "to cut off an unhealthy member from the body, and so to secure the health of the other members. I have already told you how Father Leonardo expelled nine or ten at once, and not long afterwards as many more; and I have approved of it as a praiseworthy action, for if the knife is used in good time for cutting away one or two, it may be the salvation of many."

His resolution in never putting up with obstinate and disobedient subjects, was unmodified, whatever talents or other valuable qualifications they might possess. Once he wrote a very strong letter to some students who had gone somewhat astray, concluding as follows:—"Whoever is not prepared to obey in the manner here laid down, whether he be now in college or whether he come hereafter (the rector also included), must think of some other mode of life, for this society is not for any man who is unable or unwilling to submit to the form of obedience which I have here declared."

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

"Seek not to be made judge, unless thou hast strength enough to extirpate iniquities; lest thou fear the person of the powerful, and lay a stumbling-block for thy integrity." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Lo, I have set thee this day over the nations and the kingdoms, to root out evil, and to pull down, and to waste, and to build up, and to plant." (b)—*God by the Prophet Jeremias.*

THESE words, which were spoken by God to the prophet Jeremias, are also in some measure applicable to all those who are appointed by God to govern His people. They must unite fortitude and the spirit of firmness to the spirit of meekness. They must be able to stand up when needful and oppose themselves, as a wall of invincible strength, against the powers of evil. Such was the spirit which animated the apostles and other apostolic men, who, by the holiness of their lives, and by their labours and sufferings, have adorned the church of God in all ages.

Once St. Francis of Sales being requested by the senate to publish a certain monitory which he did not think right, sent them a clear and positive refusal. The senate was irritated, and signified that if their wishes were not attended to, the temporalities of the saint should be seized. Francis, who possessed as much firmness as mildness when his duty required it, replied, that to employ such a menace indicated no acquaintance with his character; that he should always show great respect for the senate; but that, though he were to lose his

(a) Eccles. vii. 6. (b) Jerem. i. 10.

life, he would never act against his conscience. His temporal possessions were seized, and a senator reported the proceedings to him in the most injurious terms. However, Francis abated nothing of his firmness, and continued to refuse the publication of the monitory. In proportion as his moderation and firmness became conspicuous, the injury done to the holy prelate excited general sympathy and murmurs. These complaints, which became every day louder, at length induced the senate to send him a proposal, by which they agreed to restore his effects, if he would present a request for that purpose. But the holy prelate, who deemed it his duty on this occasion to support the honour of his station, replied, that the senate was too just, not to repair without his interference the wrong which they had done him without his provocation. The senate, therefore, was reduced to the necessity of restoring the sequestered property without any petition from the saint.

A person of high dignity in the church being once disposed to ordain as priest one of his nephews, who was of mature age, and up to that time had led a secular life, thinking to renounce afterwards in his favour a rich bishopric, asked the advice of the blessed Paul of the Cross. The servant of God, having in view only the glory of His divine Majesty, openly disapproved the design, and, notwithstanding the dignity of the prelate, opposed himself, with great firmness and resolution, to his intentions. He said to him with a holy liberty, that the wish to ordain his nephew did not, in his belief, proceed from the spirit of God, but rather from earthly affections, and that it was not expedient to ordain him thus at once; but an attentive examination should be made to see if he had a vocation

from God, and he ought to be put to the test by being employed in the service of the church, and in the exercise of ecclesiastical functions; and therefore he thought it well that he should assume the ecclesiastical habit, and apply himself seriously to sacred studies, in order to learn the ecclesiastical spirit; concluding, that if his lordship did not act thus, he would never give his approbation in an affair of so great importance. "To pass so quickly," he said, with great warmth, "from the sword to the altar, from a worldly occupation to that of pastor of souls, oh, no! this cannot be." He used equal firmness with his own subjects. If it happened that delinquents, corrected again and again, and penanced, were hardened and obstinate, the grief he felt at cutting them off was most bitter; but in order not to fail in the duty of a good superior, he made use of the faculties granted by the supreme pontiffs to the general superiors of the congregation, and sent them away, lest, like infected sheep, they might spread the contagion of their bad example amongst the flock of Jesus Christ. However useful a subject might be, if he were not a lover of religious observance, the good father considered his departure a benefit to the congregation. "I am more anxious for observance," he would say, "than for a great number of subjects." He was well persuaded that no man is really necessary, and said, speaking of himself, "If I thought myself necessary in this world, I should believe myself to be damned;" and resolutely repeated, "Few and good; it is better that we should be few, but good; we must be the chosen grain; the small flock is the best guarded by the shepherd."

With fortitude above all human respects, having

God before his eyes, he refused to yield to any requests he judged to be unreasonable and not conformable to the rules of the Institute. If anyone persevered he opposed him with moderation, but also with manly courage; he was firm as a rock in defending and supporting the edifice of our Lord. One of the last instructions which he gave to superiors before his death was, "Take care of the wheat, and throw away the tares."

St. Liguori spoke and acted in a similar manner. He required the strictest and most prompt obedience from the members of his congregation, and to resist his determination was infallibly followed by a dismissal. Once he forbade a certain father to go to the town of Scala; but as the father went there by stealth, when Alphonso heard of it, he did not even give him time to return to the house, but wrote to him to inform him of his exclusion from the congregation. He ordered Father Gerard Grassi, who was in the house at Cioriani, to go and live at Iliceto. When he saw that the father delayed setting out, and resisted his orders, he wrote to the superior of the house, saying, "Since Father Grassi has refused to go to Iliceto, let him know immediately that I have dismissed him on account of his refusing to obey, and declare him expelled from the congregation. Let us pray God, that if there are any subjects of a similar disposition among us, they may also go out from us as soon as possible. If perfect obedience is given up, the congregation will be destroyed."

The saint was on thorns when any hypocritical wolf disguised himself as a sheep; and as soon as he detected him, he had no rest till he had unmasked and expelled him. He perceived a certain vice in the nephew of one of the professors; he

dismissed him the same instant, without any regard to his uncle, who asked in tears for his forgiveness, and made all sorts of protestations, but in vain. When the professor saw the inflexibility of the bishop, he was so annoyed, that he gave up his class, and took leave of the seminary. When the bishop had pronounced a sentence, the tears of parents and the intercessions of friends had no influence. "What charity, what charity," he reiterated to those who wished to prevail on him to revoke his decision, "to pity one individual and risk the ruin of all the rest? This is not charity, it is cruelty."

Speaking to the members of his congregation, he used to say, "He who wishes to remain amongst us must resolve to obey, and not to disturb the house where he is, or that which may be assigned to him. I am determined not to put up with subjects whose disedifying lives cast discredit on the work of the missions, and are productive of no good either to themselves or others. My brothers and my sons in Jesus Christ, you must fully enter into what I say; God wishes to have from you, above all things, obedience and respectful submission to superiors."

On one occasion the saint had fixed that two fathers should remove from one house to another; and because the superior of the former house objected to parting with them, Alphonso thus wrote to him: "Your reverence must not object to the orders that I give you; but, on the contrary, you must obey them promptly; call to your own mind, as well as to that of the fathers, that you have made a vow of obedience. By the authority which God has given me, I will, and even command, that as soon as you receive this, you will arrange every

thing necessary for their departure. I hope your reverence will not find any difficulty in this; but however this may be, I will it to be thus, and I positively command it to be done."

The Archbishop of Turin, who well knew the holiness and prudence of the blessed Valfré, committed to him the reform of one of the first convents of his diocese, into which disorders of no trifling magnitude had introduced themselves. The blessed man, who looked at nothing but God's honour and glory, undertook the work with great gentleness, but at the same time with great firmness. He pointed out to the nuns the scandal arising from their irregularities, and the necessity of returning to their original observance. Some, as the wise virgins, were at once ready to refer themselves to his counsels; but the foolish, alleging customs and privileges, persisted in their relaxation and disorder; nay, their perversity went so far, that opposing themselves, as it were, with open force to the physician who was labouring for their cure, they loaded him with affronts, being aided in this by their relations. They began to assail him with contemptuous and spiteful conduct, and with haughty and violent expressions, calling him a hypocrite, an impostor, a calumniator, a bigot, a liar, a proud and wicked man; and not content with thus despising and outraging him, they defamed him as an ambitious person, who sought to domineer over and oppress them; they affirmed that, under the mask of piety, he was a ravenous wolf; and added a thousand other things to bring upon him the hatred and contempt of all. Although thus outraged, contemned, and derided, Sebastian never ceased to labour with great zeal at restoring order in the community, nor was he ever

weary of loading with favours those religious in particular who were the cause and origin of the war made against him. This was for years the only weapon of his warfare, until he had the consolation of seeing his labours crowned with prosperous success.

AUGUST.

DILIGENCE AND EDIFICATION.

"He hath done all things well."—MARK vii. 37.

FIRST DAY.

"Whatever thy hand is able to do, do it earnestly: for neither work, nor reason, nor wisdom, nor knowledge shall be in hell, whither thou art hastening." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"Brethren, labour the more that by good works you may make sure your calling and election." (b)—*The Apostle St. Peter.*

OUR blessed Saviour tells us in the Gospel, that a man having found a treasure in a field, hid it, and for joy thereof, went and sold all that he had and bought that field. He also tells us that a merchant who was in search of good pearls, having found one pearl of great price, went his way and sold all that he had and bought it. (c) By these two parables, our blessed Saviour teaches us to set the highest value on our eternal salvation, and to endure any labour, to undergo any privation, to suffer any pain, to make any sacrifice, in order to attain it.

Some persons, seduced by false wisdom, imagine that the work of salvation does not require much

(a) Eccl. ix. 10. (b) 2 Peter i. 10.
(c) Matt. xiii. 45.

labour, and that it can be attained without much exertion and enegy. But they are grievously mistaken. For our nature is so corrupted by sin, and so inclined to evil, our will is so blind and perverse, that we must labour earnestly and fight valiantly, if we desire to gain the victory and to save our souls. God, it is true, does not fail to bestow upon us His grace to enable us to work out our salvation, but at the same time He requires our co-operation with this His grace, if we wish to be saved. He requires us to gird up our loins, and to keep our lamps continually burning in our hands, if we wish to be admitted to the marriage of the Lamb. Christ has, indeed, by means of divine love, rendered His yoke sweet, His burden light, yet, in consequence of our natural weakness and corruption, it is only with great difficulty that we can bend our stubborn wills to His holy yoke. The doctrine of holy Scripture on this point is most decisive and clear: "The kingdom of Heaven," says our divine Redeemer, "suffereth violence, and the violent only bear it away." And in another place He says: "He that will come after Me, let him deny himself, take up his cross daily, and follow Me." And again: "Enter ye in at the narrow gate, for wide is the gate and broad is the way that leadeth to destruction, and many there are that go in thereat." And, as if this were not sufficient to convince us of the necessity of labouring earnestly for the attainment of salvation, He adds: "How narrow is the gate, and straight is the way that leadeth to life, and few there are that find it." Now I ask whether, to offer continual violence to nature, daily to mortify our disorderly inclinations by carrying our cross unceasingly, to walk along the narrow and rugged

path that leads to life, is not an arduous and difficult task, and one which requires our best efforts, our constant labour? The teaching of Christ on this point is expressly confirmed by that of the Apostles, whom He sent to preach His Gospel to all nations. St. Peter thus exhorts us in his second epistle "Wherefore, brethren, labour, that by good works you may make your calling and election sure." In another place, he represents our adversary the devil as going about like a roaring lion seeking whom he may devour, and exhorts us to be on our guard, and to repel his attacks by the shield of faith! The Apostle St. Paul describes the fearful struggle between the spirit and the flesh, and urges us in the strongest terms to pray unceasingly, and to fight valiantly against the powers of hell, if we wish to secure our salvation. "Pray," says he, "without ceasing; stand firm, having your loins girt about with truth, having on the breast-plate of justice, in all things take the shield of faith, with which you will be able to extinguish the fiery darts of the wicked one, and take unto you the helmet of salvation, by all prayer and supplication, praying at all times." He also, in the same place, represents to us the crown of glory that awaits us beyond the grave, under the figure of a prize which cannot be obtained but by great efforts, and concludes by saying that he himself feels strictly bound to labour earnestly, and chastise most severely his rebellious flesh, that he may himself be saved. "Know ye not," says he, "that they that run in the race, all run indeed, but one receiveth the prize? So run that you may obtain. And every one that striveth for the mastery refraineth himself from all things: and they indeed that they may receive a corruptible crown: but we an in-

corruptible one. I therefore so run, not as at an uncertainty: I so fight, not as one beating the air: but I chastise my body, and bring it into subjection: lest perhaps, when I have preached to others, I myself should become a cast-away." Who then, I ask, who attentively considers these and similar passages of holy Scripture, will dare to say that salvation can be secured without great diligence and care on our part?

But let us look at the lives of the saints, and see what they did and suffered to secure their eternal salvation. Behold the multitude of holy confessors who waged a continual war against their passions, and trampled under foot the world, with all its vanities, in order to secure the prize and gain the victory over their infernal enemies. Behold the array of martyrs, who suffered the most cruel torments, and washed their robes in the blood of the Lamb, in order to keep their faith to Him, and to obtain from him the crown of justice. Ah! who has ever entered the kingdom of heaven without having been first purified by the ordeal of suffering? Who has ever gained the victory or received the crown, without having first fought valiantly the battles of the Lord? Oh! no; it is in vain to hope for salvation, unless we are prepared and resolved to purchase it by great sufferings and labours, for it is only through great tribulations that we can enter into the kingdom of heaven.

SECOND DAY.

"Every good tree bringeth forth good fruit, and the evil tree bringeth forth evil fruit. A good tree cannot bring forth evil fruit, neither can an evil tree bring forth good fruit. Every tree that bringeth not forth good fruit, shall be cut down, and shall be cast into the fire. Wherefore by their fruits you shall know them." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"Remember, that perfection is not acquired by holding one's hands crossed before one: but it is necessary to labour in good earnest to overcome oneself, and to bring oneself to live, not according to one's inclinations and passions, but according to reason, and according to rule and obedience. It is a hard matter to do so, there is no denying it, but it is necessary; and with constant practice it becomes both easy and full of sweetness."—*St Francis of Sales.*

THE author of the "Imitation of Christ" strongly urges the same maxim. "Without care and diligence," he says, "thou shalt never acquire virtues. If thou begin to grow lukewarm, thou wilt begin to be uneasy; but if thou give thyself to fervour, thou shalt find great peace; and the grace of God and the love of virtue will make thee feel less labour. A fervent and diligent man is ready for all things. . . . Be never altogether idle; but be either reading or writing, praying or meditating, or labouring in something that may be for the common good. Take care thou be not slack in common exercises, and more forward in things of thy own particular devotion; but having fully and faithfully performed what thou art bound to, and what is enjoined thee, if thou hast any time remaining, give thyself to thyself according as thy devotion shall incline thee."

(a) Matt. vii. 17-20.

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque made the following resolution, which she fulfilled with the greatest fidelity: "I will be careful to render all my actions pleasing to God, edifying to my neighbour, and salutary to my soul; being ever faithful in the practice of the good that my Divine Master wishes me to perform, committing, if possible, no voluntary fault; and I will never pardon my transgressions without first taking vengeance on myself by some penitential act."

St. Catharine of Bologna attached the greatest importance to the good employment of time, for she knew how short it is, and at the same time how precious, since, while it lasts, we can merit eternal life; whereas, when it is gone, we shall no longer be able to do anything. She was never seen idle, but was always occupied in what was useful and holy. "Oh," she would often say, "how pitiable is the blindness of those who set no value on this inestimable treasure of time, and employ in offending God the richest gift He has bestowed upon them! And we too," she would add, "we do not think enough of the consequences of a good use, or of a waste of our time, namely, our salvation, or our eternal damnation."

The venerable Berckmans had made it an inviolable practice, from his entrance into religion, to fill up every vacant moment by some exercise, either of piety or study. He very frequently renewed this resolution in his meditations (as we learn from his memoranda), protesting before God that he would apply with unremitting ardour to attain the end of his vocation; adding, "I will apply most seriously and constantly to my studies, as to one of the most efficacious means to reach the

end of my vocation; I did not enter into religion to lead an idle life, but to labour; it was only on this condition that the Father of the family condescended to open the door of His house in my favour; to correspond, therefore, with His goodness, I must do my utmost to render myself able to glorify Him."

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi, even when she was mistress of novices, took great delight in being employed in the most humble and laborious offices in the house, such as washing the clothes, cleaning the rooms, drawing water, and scouring. When labouring at night with the lay sisters, she would beg them to leave off, and go to rest, whilst she who had come to help them would go on with great cheerfulness. When entreated not to do so much, she used to say that she had the flesh of an ass, and did not feel anything, and that she seemed to herself to be useless, and not to know how to do anything. "This body," said she, "ought to be allowed no rest. It is a little ass, which should bear the burden night and day."

We also read of St. Francis of Sales, that he was always employed either in preaching or instructing, in prayer, in study, or in other duties. When he found any leisure, he went to the hospitals, or to private houses, to visit the sick. He administered to them the sacraments, and sometimes did for them the meanest and most disgusting services.

Many labour day and night in order to gain some worldly advantage; but how few there are who labour earnestly to overcome themselves, to advance in virtue, and to secure their eternal happiness. Oh, if men would apply themselves with the same diligence to the pursuit of virtue as they do in pursuit of the vain and perishable things of

earth, how much better and happier would be their condition.

St. Dorotheus, after his entrance into religion, used to make the following reflection: "When I studied in the world," said he, "I took my studies so much to heart that I thought of nothing else; and had it not been for one of my friends, who took care to provide me something to eat, and to call me at dinner time, I would have never thought of eating. The vehement desire I had to learn went so far, that when I was at table I had my book always open before me, that I might eat and study at the same time; and at night, when I came from school, I presently lighted my candle, and studied till midnight; and when I lay down to sleep I took my book into my bed, and after I had slept awhile I turned to reading again, and was so wholly taken up with this passion of studying, that I could take no delight in anything else. Since I came to be a religious, I have often reflected and said to myself, 'If thou didst heretofore take so much pains, and wert so zealous to acquire eloquence, what great pains and care oughtest thou not to take now, in order to acquire true virtue?' And this very thought," says he, "was a great help to me, and gave me fresh courage and new strength."

Let us encourage ourselves by the same consideration, and remember that it is of greater concern to become good religious, than great and learned orators. Let all our endeavours and applications therefore be to attain to the knowledge and love of God, which is the greatest, and indeed our only affair. All the time that our blessed Saviour lived amongst us he had no other intent than to manifest the tender love He had for us, and to procure us the greatest happiness we are capable of

enjoying; and to that end He refused not to shed His most precious blood, and even to lay down His life. And shall we think it too much, in return for so great goodness, to make it our chief business to love and serve Him, and earnestly to labour to secure our eternal welfare?

THIRD DAY.

"All our good and evil is to be measured by the good or bad qualities of our actions: they show what we are, just as trees are known by their fruits."—*St. Austin.*

"It is not sufficient that we perform good works, but we must perform them *well*, in imitation of Jesus Christ, of whom it is written that '*He did all things well.*' We must do every thing in a Christian spirit, namely, with the perfection and for the ends which actuated Christ; otherwise our actions, although good of themselves, will be more deserving of punishment than reward."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

The saints extol diligence and care in performing well our actions above the most severe practices of penance, and look upon it as the best means to attain perfection.

"Do not copy those," writes St. Francis of Sales, "who place perfection in undertaking many things, but rather those who do well what little they perform. It is much better to do a little well than to undertake a great deal and do it badly: a little and good is far preferable. Hence if we desire to become especially pleasing to our Lord, we need not double our work, but merely redouble our zeal

in performing it. Many imagine they cannot truly do penance for their sins without the exercise of corporal austerities. We know, however, that he does a good penance who performs well all his actions, with the intention of pleasing his Lord: this is a perfect and a meritorious work."

"Strive not to *appear* singular," says St. Bernard, "but to *be really such*." This may be accomplished by following diligently the common life, by being exact and punctual in all that is enjoined, and by performing it in the time and manner prescribed; thus doing common things in an uncommon and perfect way. This is the means of seeming like others exteriorly, and being singular interiorly, which is a great virtue, and highly to be praised.

"The Lord," says St. John of the Cross, "measures our perfection neither by the multitude nor the magnitude of our exercises, but by the manner in which we perform them. The greater the love with which we execute them, the greater their perfection, and the greater will be their future reward."

We read of St. Francis of Sales, that he was most punctual in everything, whether in reciting his office, privately or publicly, or in the minutest ceremonies at the altar, or in choir. The saint took a particular care to purify his intention, aiming to please God alone. He used to say that "to perform any action well consists especially in doing it with a pure intention and a determined will to please God alone; this is like the mould or principle of our actions, which renders them easy and graceful."

In ecclesiastical history it is related that the Abbot Pambo, seeing a dancing-girl very carefully

adorned, began to sigh and weep; and when asked the cause, he answered, that it was because, he did not take so much pains to please God as she did to please men.

The blessed mother Jane Frances of Chantal once, on being wrapt into an ecstacy, saw her holy father St. Francis of Sales in his pontifical vestments, seated in a beautiful chair, in great majesty and glory. She threw herself on her knees before him, and said, "Father, tell me what thou wishest me to do in order to arrive at perfection, to which I aspire." The saint replied, "Do always well what you have begun well." "But, my father," replied she, "teach me the will of God that I may perform it." He replied, "God wills, my daughter, that you should finish with love and courage what love has made you begin."

St. Catharine of Bologna used to say to her sisters, "I have no hesitation to affirm that a religious who all her life long is faithful to all the ordinary exercises of the house, punctual in the choir, at work, at the refectory, and careful to retire at the appointed hour, will certainly receive a great reward, and will be placed among the confessors and martyrs; but the flesh and our sensuality make us tepid, and the devil on his side is not ignorant of the means of holding us back on every occasion." Her conduct was in perfect conformity to her teaching. Nothing was more edifying than to see her punctuality at every exercise, and she quite disregarded her office of superior, her old age and her infirmities, which furnish so many persons with excuses for want of regularity. At the first sound of the bell she used to leave every thing and start off at once, saying, "The voice of God makes itself heard, the angels invite us, and

obedience calls us. Let us prepare our hearts and collect some grains of wheat in our storehouses. Come, my sisters," she used to say, when there was question of the divine office, "let us go and pay a just tribute of praise to the goodness of God."

Care and diligence in the practice of virtue, and in doing all our actions well, is a most efficacious means towards drawing upon us God's choicest blessings. St. Ignatius, in his Constitutions, declares that the stricter our union with God, and the more liberal we show ourselves to His divine Majesty, the more bountiful shall we find Him to us, and we shall obtain daily more and more graces from Him. This is in accordance with those words of the holy prophet David, where he thus speaks to God: "With the holy Thou wilt be holy; with the innocent Thou wilt be innocent; with the elect Thou wilt be elect; and with those who are perverse Thou also wilt be perverse."(a)

This is confirmed by the doctrine of the saints, who teach that he who makes good use of the grace he has received deserves to obtain new graces; but, on the contrary, he who does not employ the first well, becomes underserving of any more. Solomon, in the Book of Wisdom, gives a good reason why the manna dissolved and corrupted as soon as the first ray of the sun appeared. "It is, O Lord," says he, "that it might be known to all that we ought to prevent the sun to bless Thee." Thus, in order to punish the indolence of those who would not rise before the sun, to avail themselves of his benefits towards them, God permitted that the first beam of the sun should deprive them of food for the whole day. The same thing is beautifully

(a) Ps. xvii. 26, 27.

represented to us by our Saviour in the parable of the nobleman, who, going into a far country to take possession of a kingdom, called to him his servants, and divided amongst them his money, that they might trade during his absence; and at his return, having demanded an account of them, he appointed them governors of as many cities as they had gained talents; to him that gained ten talents he gave the government of ten cities, and to him that gained five talents he gave the government of five cities. This plainly shows, that as this nobleman was pleased to recompense the fidelity and industry of his servants with such excessive liberality as to give him who gained ten talents the government of ten cities, so Almighty God, if we faithfully perform our duties and take care to do our actions well, will shower down His graces and blessings upon us in abundance; but, on the other hand, if we do not diligently follow the motions of grace, we shall not only be deprived of what we have received, but shall be severely punished, as the unprofitable servant was who did not lay out his talent to advantage.

FOURTH DAY.

"Amongst ordinary occupations we should have our spiritual exercises most at heart, taking care to do them well in preference to other things, where obedience does not enjoin the contrary, because spiritual things appertain to God directly, and most efficaciously conduce to perfection; if we neglect those, we draw down upon ourselves that malediction threatened by the Holy Ghost to those who do the work of God negligently."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

"Let all apply their minds to spiritual things, and to the attainment of solid and perfect virtues, and learn to esteem these far more than human knowledge, or any other qualification or gift of nature; for those are interior endowments, and alone can impart worth to external gifts or acquirements."—*St. Ignatius.*

THIS saint earnestly recommends this point, and often insists upon it: "What we value most in religious persons," says he, "is not depth of learning, but humility and obedience, a spirit of recollection and prayer." "The study," he writes in another place, "of novices, and of all others, ought to be that of self-denial, and of the most proper means of advancing in virtue and perfection." And again: "Let all devote sufficient time to their spiritual exercises, and endeavour to advance daily in virtue, according to the measure of grace God has given them." And elsewhere he adds, "Let every one be as exact as possible in spending well the time allotted for prayer, meditation, and spiritual reading." And these words, *as exact as possible*, deserve, no doubt, particular attention.

In the "Life of St. Fulgentius," Surius relates that, amongst the religious of the monastery where

the holy abbot lived, there were some who laboured hard, and devoted themselves entirely to the service of the community, but who applied not with equal fervour to prayer, spiritual reading, and interior recollection; and says that St. Fulgentius never thought much of them. He always showed a far greater love and esteem for those who, though unable, by reason of their weak and sickly constitution, to be of much service to the community, were yet devoted to spiritual things, and careful to advance in virtue. And doubtless he acted right. For if we do not cultivate the spirit of piety, what will it avail us to have talents and other good qualities? In the account which is one day to be demanded of the Superior, God will not ask him whether *his subjects were men of study and science*, but these are the questions God will ask him:—"*Have those committed to your charge improved themselves in the science of the saints? Have they advanced daily in virtue? Have they been employed according to their talents, without suffering their exterior actions to check their interior advancement?*" It is this for which we will be accountable to God on the day of judgment; "God will not ask us," says the 'Imitation of Christ,' "what we have read, but what we have done; not how learnedly we have spoken, but how religiously we have lived."

The sacred text relates that our blessed Saviour, having sent his disciples to preach, they returned full of joy, telling Him that even the devils were subject to them in His name. To whom our Saviour answered, "Rejoice not, that you work miracles, and that the devils are subject to you; but rejoice in this, that your names are written in heaven." We ought then to place all our joy and

happiness in acquiring the kingdom of heaven, for without that, all the rest is nothing. "What will it avail a man to gain the whole world, if he loses his soul?"

St. Dorotheus relates of his disciple Dositheus, that he discharged the duty of infirmarian so well, was so attentive to the sick, made their beds, and arranged their rooms so carefully, kept all things so neat, and in such good order, that on the saint's going one day to visit the infirmary, Dositheus said to him, "Father, I have a thought of vain-glory, which tells me, that I do my duty perfectly well: and methinks you ought to be perfectly well satisfied with me." But the answer of the good abbot gave a check to the presumption of his disciple. "I allow," said St. Dorotheus, "that you are grown a very good infirmarian; but I do not perceive as yet that you are become a good religious man."

The answer of this holy man ought to teach us to make what relates to our spiritual advancement our chief business, and to apply ourselves to all our other affairs with care and diligence, but without weakening in the slightest degree our spirit of prayer, or forgetting our obligation of working out our salvation, and of labouring for the attainment of perfection. We must hold it as an infallible maxim, that such spiritual exercises as conduce to our advancement in piety must ever be preferred to all other things. For these especially maintain and advance us in virtue; and if we are negligent therein, we shall soon feel our neglect prejudicial to us. Derangement of our interior proceeds from our growing cold in spiritual exercises. "My heart is withered within me," says the Psalmist, "because I have forgotten to eat my bread." If

the food of our souls is wanting, it is certain we shall become very feeble and languishing.

St. Basil says we ought to be very exact in giving to Almighty God the time allotted for our spiritual exercises. And as, whenever it happens that we have not had time to eat or sleep, in consequence of our being obliged to watch with a sick person, we take great care to refresh our wearied bodies, and afterwards are sure to find time for doing so; in like manner, in case we are hindered from making our prayer or examination of conscience at the usual hour, we must ardently desire to supply that omission, and acquit ourselves of these duties as soon as we possibly can. Whenever, during the time of spiritual exercises, we are, through necessity, employed otherwise by our Superiors, their intention is, not that we neglect, but only that we defer for awhile our spiritual duties, and afterwards resume and fully perform them, according to the saying of the Wise Man: "Let nothing hinder thee from praying always;" that is, let no business make you omit your prayers, —and certainly nothing can make a good religious man omit them, because he will always find sufficient leisure for them.

In the book called *Bibliotheca Patrum*, it is written of St. Dorotheus, that though he was often obliged to go very late to bed, and occasionally to rise in the night in order to entertain strangers and travellers of whom he had the care, yet he never omitted rising to prayer at the same hour with the other religious of the convent. When he perceived that, in consequence of his great fatigues, the brother whose office it was to call up the rest of the religious did not knock at the door of his cell, he requested of one of his companions to do him that

kindness, though he had lately had a violent fever, and was not quite recovered.

The religious, then, who sincerely wishes to live up to the spirit of his holy calling, and to advance in solid perfection, must take care to spend with much diligence in the Lord the appointed time for spiritual exercises, studying to perform them with perfection. We must not take upon ourselves to follow our particular inclinations on this point, making use of such times as suit best our own wills, but must diligently adhere to the prescription of the rules, and to the direction of superiors. We must do this, 1st. For the sake of uniformity and regularity in the house, since great confusion and inconvenience would arise if each one were allowed to follow his own will in this respect. 2nd. For the sake of edification, since the sight of many persons united together in spiritual duties must necessarily excite devotion; and moreover, each one seeing the piety, recollection, and modesty of his brethren, will feel animated to perform with increased fervour his own spiritual duties. And 3rdly, for the sake of fidelity to the rules, since if any one begins to neglect the time appointed for his duties, he will be gradually led to omit them altogether; for the time will insensibly pass away, and he will find himself at the close of the day without having performed any, or but very few, of his exercises of piety.

But besides employing the very time appointed for spiritual exercises, we must also take care to employ it *with all diligence in the Lord*; that is, according to the measure of grace which we have received, according to the different number of talents which have been bestowed upon us by God. We know that he who had received ten talents

had to labour in proportion, and to gain other ten; and he who received five had to negotiate with them to gain other five. We must do the same; we have all received some talents of God, hence we must apply ourselves with proportionate diligence to negotiate them, especially by our diligence and care in the spiritual exercises. How readily does the soldier expose himself to every danger for the honour of his sovereign, and to merit promotion in his service. How zealously and perseveringly does the merchant labour to increase his wealth; to what inconveniences does he not cheerfully submit, with what untiring patience does he not spend days and nights, to gain a little perishable wealth; with what ardour does not the philosopher apply to study, to increase in worldly wisdom. Why, then, should not the religious, who aims at perfection, who seeks the favour and friendship of God, who aspires after eternal heavenly treasures, strive to pray fervently, to labour diligently, and to suffer joyfully, in so holy and glorious a work?

FIFTH DAY.

"There is no work so holy and divine in which Christians can be engaged as the tremendous sacrifice of the Mass, wherein is daily immolated on our altars by the hands of the priest that life-giving Host and Victim, by whom we are reconciled to our heavenly Father."—*The Holy Council of Trent.*

"The holy Mass is certainly the most excellent, and the holiest of all sacred functions, highly acceptable to God and profitable to our souls. Hence, when Mass is said, the angels crowd around the sacred altar, and with heads bowed down, and impressed with reverential awe, pay their court to their sovereign Lord. Who, then, can tell with what purity, attention, reverence, and devotion, the priest should approach to celebrate it? He ought to approach the sacred altar as Jesus Christ; assist at it as an angel, minister unto it as a saint; offer therein the petitions of the people as a Pontiff; pray for peace between God and man as a mediator; and pray for himself as a frail and sinful man."—*St. Laurence Justinian.*

"THE holy Sacrifice of the Mass," as St. Francis of Sales remarks, "is the sum of spiritual exercises, the centre of religion, the heart of devotion, and the soul of piety."

This consideration, besides inspiring us with the most exalted idea of this holy mystery, should induce us to imitate the great fervour and devotion with which the saints celebrated or assisted at it.

The venerable Father Da Ponte, although often very weak, and occasionally confined to his bed, when the time drew near for him to say Mass, seemed invested with a supernatural vigour; insomuch, that rising at early dawn, he offered the divine sacrifice with great fervour; having ended it, and made a long thanksgiving, he returned to his bed. He never presented himself at the altar till after a long prayer, a severe discipline, and

having purified his heart by sacramental confession, which he frequented daily.

He made his thanksgiving with great fervour, kneeling and bare-headed, and, when he thought himself secure from observation, prostrate with his face upon the ground. Finally, all his best works, from morning till night, such as prayer, examens, divine office, &c., would not have had the desired savour of devotion if performed elsewhere than at the feet of Jesus, in His sacrament of love. When asked why he did not spare himself, since he might satisfy his devotion in his own room, with less inconvenience, he replied : " My Lord Jesus Christ remains shut up in the tabernacle alone, can I do less than go and keep Him company a little ? " And when he quitted his dear Lord to attend to his various duties, he never did so without doing violence to himself, saying, " O my Jesus ! my body goes away, but I leave my heart here, like the angels who never lose sight of Thee, even when employed for the benefit of men."

The same devotional fervour was shown by the blessed Paul of the Cross when celebrating Mass. At this time the venerable father appeared all tenderness and ardour, and seemed transformed into a seraph of love. After a long and fervent preparation, he ascended the altar, and then his face was often seen to change colour and become inflamed, while his eyes overflowed with tears of interior sweetness. For many years he could never say Mass without weeping. Afterwards, being placed by our Lord in the crucible of aridities and desolations, his tears were not so continual, but he was often observed to shed them from the consecration to the communion. After Mass he retired to some quiet spot, where he could give vent to the burn-

ing affections of his heart, and enjoy the possession of his only love.

The blessed Leonard used to call the Mass "the sum of Christianity, the soul of faith, the centre of piety, and the epitome of all that is good and beautiful in the church of God." The lively faith which he had in this great mystery excited his devotion to it so wonderfully, that it was seen in his manner of celebrating: he never approached the altar without being girt with hair-cloth, and without having offered thirty-three times to the Eternal Father the most sacred blood of Jesus Christ, praying Him to grant, by virtue of this sacrifice, that his heart might be always pure and clean, and free from every stain of sin. In vesting himself for the holy sacrifice he accompanied every action with such sentiments of lively faith and piety that one could not fail to see outwardly the interior fervour which was glowing in his heart. In going to the altar, he pictured to his mind the awful scene on Calvary, and saw with the eye of faith the Holy Trinity surrounded by angels and saints, ready to receive the sacrifice he was about to offer. His deportment was that of a man raised above the world, recollected and absorbed in contemplating his God.

Of the blessed Claver it is related, that however numerous his occupations might be, having first made his confession with great sorrow, he always spent a full half hour in preparing for this divine sacrifice; from that moment till the end of his thanksgiving he spoke to no one, being wholly absorbed in the thought and love of Him he then offered and received. When at the altar his face appeared so inflamed with divine love, especially on the feasts of our Blessed Lord and His Holy Mo-

ther, that he excited modesty, piety, and devotion even in the most insensible, and numbers of persons experienced real consolation from hearing his Mass.

We read the same thing of another great missionary, the venerable Father Segneri. This holy man enjoyed such a singular devotion and fervour at the time of Mass, that when he was about to receive the holy sacrament, he became like a flame of fire, and a copious stream of tears flowed from his eyes; so that the brother who served his Mass every morning during the last years of his life, relates that he invariably found his handkerchief so bathed with his excessive weeping that it was necessary to stretch it out in the open air to dry. Many also testify that they have often seen him, when about to communicate at Mass, so overpowered with fervour, that from the violent pressure of his heart numerous drops of blood were forced down his nostrils.

While offering up the holy sacrifice of the Mass, the countenance of St. Ignatius used to become so inflamed, and his heart so moved, that it was necessary after Mass to support and even carry him back to his chamber, to the astonishment of the beholders. The case of St. Philip Neri is still more remarkable. While others require a long preparation to say Mass devoutly, he rather wanted a little distraction beforehand; so that many times before going to the altar he used to have read to him a book of fables. In the act of celebrating he was often noticed weeping and sighing, and to pause sometimes, being unable to proceed; at one time he was violently agitated, at another time almost immovably absorbed. At the offertory his joyful trepidation was so great in his younger days, that while pouring the wine into the chalice

he was obliged to steady his arm by pressing it upon the altar. At the elevation he frequently remained with his arms extended in the air, for a time unable to withdraw them. Occasionally his whole person used to be raised a foot above ground. At the communion he experienced a delicious sweetness, and it was with difficulty that he withdrew his lips from the chalice, upon which the impression of his teeth was sometimes left. Hence he did not like to celebrate where his face could be seen, even by the server, whom he required to remain apart until a sign was made to him to approach. When he had to give communion to others his fervour increased, to the astonishment of those present; his hand holding the ciborium trembled violently, his countenance became inflamed, and he shed copious tears. The prayers he recited with such devotion that the bystanders were often moved to tears. Afterwards he retired immediately to his chamber; but with his face pale as death, and so absorbed as not to recognise any one he met. His time, however, in saying Mass publicly was short, in order not to tire the hearers; but when he said it in his private oratory it lasted for hours.

SIXTH DAY.

"The singing of the Psalms is the prelude of the praises with which the saints honour God in heaven." — *St. Gregory Nazianzen.*

"The divine office is one of the most excellent actions in which we can be employed; its object being the praise of God, is the fitting ministry of Angels. It should therefore be done, not in a mere routine way, but from choice, and with mental application."—*St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi.*

When this saint heard the signal for the office she was all alive, ardently desiring to go and praise God, her face expressing her overflowing joy. On hearing this signal, she instantly left whatever she had in hand, and desired her novices to do the same, saying to them, "This signal is the voice of God, which calls us; we must attend to it, and perform what it requires."

When she heard the office hurried over she suffered greatly, and said: "It does not suit me to despatch the divine praises as we despatch the other business of the house," and she endeavoured to have it recited without precipitation or anxiety. Once, as they were chanting very fast, she rose from her place, and going to the mother prioress, said, with humility and zeal, "Perhaps they chant in such haste because they have something to do which is more for the glory of God." By this means the fault was made known to the prioress, who took care to have it rectified. The blessed Paul of the Cross used to say: "When we assemble to recite our office we must animate our faith, and remember we are joining the angels, who descend into our choir to sing with us the praises of God."

Father Suarez says of himself, that when he took up his Breviary all other thoughts vanished from his mind; so that, while the office lasted, no affair, however important, ever distracted him. Father Alvarez never recited his office walking or in a public place; but generally kneeling, and in the solitude of his chamber, where he meditated on the holy sentiments suggested by God's word. The good effects of this practice were afterwards discernible in his spiritual exhortations. At the words, *Let us fall down before God*, he used to prostrate his body upon the earth with as much veneration as if His Divine Majesty were sensibly present. During the remainder of the office his attention was uninterrupted, so that until it was ended he would give no answer to any question.

Father Fabro, to keep attentive to his office, used to imagine his guardian angel to be near and taking notes of what was well said; and that, on the other hand, a demon was ready to mark every distraction. At the commencement of each psalm he prayed his heavenly Father for the proper spirit. Before each little hour St. Francis Xavier fervently recited the *Veni sancte Spiritus*. St. Bonaventure, at his office, fancied himself amid a choir of angels. The same was done by St. Vincent, who used to place himself in the most humble posture, on bended knees, with uncovered head, whenever he said office privately, except the three last years of his life, when sickness obliged him to be seated; but when he said office in the public choir he seemed to be out of his senses, and wholly wrapt in God.

"O! if all priests and religious," exclaims St. Liguori, "said the office as they ought, it is certain that the church would not be in the deplora-

ble state in which we see it. How many sinners would be rescued from the slavery of the devil? How many souls would love God with greater fervour?" This saint suggests the following method for reciting devoutly the divine office: "On entering the church or taking up the Breviary to recite the divine office, leave at the door or dismiss from the mind all worldly thoughts." This is precisely the admonition of the Holy Ghost: "Ante orationem præpara animam tuam."(a) Consider, then, that the church obliges you, as her minister, to praise the Lord, and to supplicate His divine mercy for all men. Imagine that the angels assist, with thuribles in their hands, to offer your prayers to God, as an odoriferous incense of holy affections. "Dirigatur," says the psalmist, "oratio mea sicut incensum in conspectu tuo."(b) Hence the apostle St. John saw the angels, "having golden vials full of odours, which are the prayers of the saints." In a word, think that you are going to speak to God, and to treat with Him concerning your own welfare and that of the whole church; and remember that He then regards you with especial love, and that His ears are more open than at other times to the petitions which you then present to him.

At the commencement of the office, offer to His honour the praises which you are going to recite, and beg of him to deliver you from distractions, and to give you light and aid to praise Him, and to pray to Him as you ought; and for this purpose recite, with great attention, the usual prayer, "*Aperi Domine*," &c. In beginning the office, be not, as some are, in a hurry to finish as soon as possible.

(a) Eccl. xviii. 23. (b) Ps. cxl. 2.

St. Catharine of Bologna mentions five conditions as necessary for the perfect recital of the divine office:—1st We ought to avoid heaviness and drowsiness in this great affair, and act with profound respect. 2ndly. Each one should recite or sing the whole of what belongs to her part of the choir, without interrupting herself or leaving off. 3rdly. We ought to observe silence with a religious fidelity, for at such a time nothing but absolute necessity can excuse the breach of it. 4thly. We ought to articulate distinctly, and observe the pauses, and avoid being too quick or too slow. 5thly. We ought to preserve to the end a continual fervour, and patiently support the temptations against it; humility demands, too, that each one should make her voice unite with the voices of the others, and never seek to overpower them. These rules give to the divine office an agreeable and edifying harmony.

She looked upon it as a great fault to show the slightest levity at a time when a crowd of heavenly spirits are collected to unite with us in singing God's praises. "This levity," she used to say, "offends God grievously; and it is enough to deprive her who is guilty of it of all taste for the divine office; and once deprived of this taste, she is disposed to new levities. If a religious really found her happiness in serving God, her heart would be attracted by the divine sweetness, and would rise towards Him; and then she would be so attentive to the holy words of her office, that she would never notice those things which excite laughter. Alas! my dear daughters," she used to say, "is it to be believed, that any one can be occupied with puerilities in the company of angels, in a holy place, and during an action prescribed

for paying to God the tribute of praise due to Him? On the contrary, let us sing with so much fervour that God may be satisfied with us, and those who hear us pleased and edified."

SEVENTH DAY.

"This is the will of God, your sanctification." (s)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"To be perfect in our vocation is nothing else than to fulfil the duties and offices which our condition and state of life oblige us to perform; and to accomplish them well, and only for the honour and love of God, referring them all to His glory. He who acts thus may be said to be perfect in his state of life, and a man according to the heart and will of God."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The venerable Berkmans distinguished himself in an especial manner by his fidelity in fulfilling with great diligence the various duties attached to his particular vocation. The Rector of the Noviciate relates this circumstance:—"Having been frequently solicited by the young novice to tell him publicly of his faults, I could not refuse him this satisfaction. Accordingly, I desired all the novices, amounting to nearly a hundred, to mark down in writing whatever they perceived defective in Berkmans. I then assembled them together in the house of the noviciate, where, having received and opened their notes, not one of them contained a single complaint; no one having observed the

(s) 1 Thess. iv. 3.

slightest fault in him, which is the more surprising if we consider the number of these young persons, all beginners in the spiritual life, and of a very delicate conscience, which, joined to their natural vivacity, would make them liable to observe the smallest faults in their companion, especially as he was the object of peculiar affection and esteem. The result of this meeting caused much greater confusion to the humble novice than the declaration of the greatest faults could have done. We were all obliged to pity him, and to console him as if he had fallen into some terrible disgrace; in fine, all who were present felt equally delighted and edified by his innocence and humility." In the lives of the holy fathers of the desert, we read of the Abbot Paphnutius, a man famous for his sanctity, that one day he begged to know from our Lord if he possessed any merit in His sight; and our Lord replied to him that his merit was equal to that of a certain gentleman, a baron, whom He named to him. The saint set off immediately to find him, and the baron received him courteously, and entertained him. As soon as supper was ended, the saint begged to know the tenor of his life. The baron excused himself, saying that he did not possess any virtue; but afterwards, being entreated with great importunity, he said he was attentive to afford lodging to pilgrims, and to provide them with as much as was necessary for their journey; that he never despised the poor, but succoured them in their wants; that he caused justice to be administered rightly, and always gave a just sentence, never departing from what he knew to be right, either on account of recommendations or of his own feelings; that he never was guilty of any oppression of his subjects; that he allowed all who

wished, to sow their grain on his lands, and never took beyond the just rent; that no one could complain of having ever received any injury or trouble from any one of his family, or from his cattle; that he had never grieved any one, nor ever spoken ill of another, but that he honoured all, loved all, and helped all in whatever he could, and studied to keep all in peace and concord. On hearing this, the holy abbot was greatly consoled, and understood that true perfection does not consist in extraordinary actions, but in fulfilling well the duties of our state.

St. Austin, speaking of these words of the Psalmist, "*I will celebrate Thy praise all the day long:*" "Would you know," says he, "the way to praise God always? Perform well what you do, and you will praise Him continually." "They pray always," says St. Hilary, "who always perform their actions to please and glorify God, whereby they make their life a perpetual prayer, and they who thus live night and day, their lives are no other than a continual meditation on the divine law." St. Jerome, writing upon this verse of the Psalmist, "*Sun and moon praise ye the Lord, and let the light and all the stars praise Him;*" asks how the sun and moon, the light, and stars, can praise God?—and answers the question himself thus: "By fulfilling well the office appointed to them by the Creator at the moment of their creation; for by this continual service they render to God a continual praise: hence, whoever acquits himself well of his charge, and performs well the mere ordinary actions to which his profession obliges him, such a one praises God always and exercises continual prayer." This doctrine may also be confirmed by those words of the Holy

Ghost in Ecclesiasticus: "He who observes the law multiplies prayer. It is a wholesome sacrifice to keep the commandments, and withdraw one's self from all kind of iniquity."

Oh, how thankful, then, ought we to be to our bountiful Lord for having made the attainment of perfection so easy. God, the better to urge the children of Israel to serve Him with diligence, and to observe His law faithfully, spoke thus to them: "The commandment which I give you to-day, consists not in anything above your reach, nor is it far from you; it is not in heaven, whereby you might excuse yourself, saying, Who is able to ascend to heaven to bring it from thence, to the end that we may hear and fulfil it? Nor is it anything beyond the sea, so that one may complain and say, Who of us is able to cross the seas to go to bring it, to the end that we may hear and perform what is required of us? But it is a thing very near to you, a precept with which you often entertain yourselves, which you have often in your mouth, the execution of which depends upon no other than your own heart." We may say the same of the perfection to which we are called, for to attain it we are not required to retire into a desert, to macerate our flesh by disciplines unto blood, or to practise any extraordinary thing which may be above our strength, but we are only required to fufil diligently the ordinary duties attached to our calling. The great St. Anthony thus once addressed his disciples: "The Greeks, who devoted themselves to the study of wisdom, undertook great voyages, both by sea and land, underwent great labours and hardships, and exposed themselves to very great dangers to attain it. But you, to acquire virtue, which is true wisdom, are not obliged to

go so far, nor to expose yourselves to great danger; you need not even go out of your cells, for you will find it there, or rather the kingdom of God is within yourselves; it is in doing things that are most familiar to you, and that you do every day, that your perfection consists."

EIGHTH DAY.

"I beseech you that you walk worthy of the vocation in which you are called." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"At the creation God commanded all the plants to bear fruit, each in its own kind: in like manner he commands all Christians, who are living plants in His church, to bring forth the fruits of devotion, each one in kind, according to his rank and vocation."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

That we may fulfil the duties of our state with that fidelity which will make us holy in our vocation, we must take care that our actions be endowed with external and internal perfection. External perfection requires the following conditions: 1st. That they be done with care and accuracy. In human arts and sciences no one ever acquires any perfection unless he apply himself with great care and diligence to his profession. For example: a painter can never become skilful in his art unless he use great accuracy in the choice of his colours, be most careful in mixing them, and then considers well every stroke he

(a) Ephes. iv. 1.

makes. Much less can any one perform with due perfection his various duties in religion unless he strive to be very accurate, and avoid all carelessness. St. Ignatius, seeing a novice performing something with great negligence, asked him for whom he was doing it; having been answered that he was performing it for God, the saint severely rebuked him, telling him he might have been excused if he were doing it for men; but that it was shameful to do thus what belonged to God's service.

2ndly. That they be fulfilled with promptitude, avoiding all unnecessary waste of time. If we observe men in the world we see them getting through numberless duties with great alacrity, and this merely to gain some temporal advantage. Much more, then, ought religious to employ with all diligence the time allotted for each duty, without losing a single moment, fulfilling the offices entrusted to them with all possible alacrity; without, however, falling into the opposite extreme of hurry.

3rdly. That they be done in perfect conformity with the command of the superior as to time, manner, and place; not choosing what time is more suitable to our own dispositions, but completing the charge at the exact time assigned, and also doing it in the manner and in the place prescribed.

The conditions necessary for the internal perfection of our actions are the following:—

1. They must be done with a pure intention of pleasing God. This is most important, and a thing in which we very often fail. Hence it is very useful to consecrate every action of the day to Almighty God as soon as we rise in the morning, and frequently to renew this offering during the day; so that afterwards, when vanity shall seek to

rob us of the merit of our deeds, we may say to the tempter, in the words of St. Bernard, that he has come too late. Father Rodriguez tells us of a religious who used to pause a little before each action, and being asked the reason, he replied, that he was taking his aim, that is, purifying his intention by raising his mind to God.

2. They must be done with a holy cheerfulness, and under the influence of the spirit of love. It belongs to the men of the world to act from a motive of mere servile fear; but as regards us who are devoted to holy charity, we ought to be influenced by feelings of love, remembering that we are not slaves, but children fulfilling the will of the best and tenderest of fathers. What a subject of edification must it not be to all who witness it, to see a number of religious employed in various offices, evincing great cheerfulness, and showing by the sweet serenity of their countenances the joy of their souls.

3. They must be done in a spirit of devotion by accompanying and animating them with holy prayer. This was what the ancient saints of the desert constantly practised whilst engaged in manual labour in the fields; whilst their hands were employed in external duties their hearts were fixed on God, if not actually, at least habitually, often directing their thoughts to him in their occupations. This is of the highest importance for religious, and upon the practice of it depends in a great part the progress they will make in perfection. In this we should imitate our Blessed Lady, who, when engaged in her various humble duties at Nazareth, kept her eyes and heart fixed on her beloved Son, our divine Redeemer, doing all things to please Him. We must remember that we also

have the high privilege and happiness of living under the same roof with Jesus, who is continually present amongst us, watching us from the sacred tabernacle. Let us, then, like the Blessed Virgin, often turn our hearts and affections towards this divine Lover during our various duties; so shall we perform them with perfection, and lay up treasures of merit for eternal life.

NINTH DAY.

"Whatsoever things are true, whatsoever modest, whatsoever just, whatsoever holy, whatsoever lovely, whatsoever of good fame, if there be any virtue, any praise of discipline, think on these things." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"True devotion never injures, but perfects whatever it influences: when it is made a hindrance to the pursuit of some lawful calling, it becomes false devotion. The bee, says Aristotle, extracts honey from flowers without doing them the least harm, leaving them as fresh and perfect as it found them; but true devotion does still more, for it not only does no injury to any lawful vocation or employment, but it adds grace and beauty. All kinds of precious stones, when steeped in honey, become more brilliant, each in its own lustre; so all persons, when imbued with true devotion, become more pleasing and agreeable, each one in his particular vocation. Under the influence of devotion, the care of a family is more peaceably attended to, the mutual love of husband and wife becomes more sincere, the service of the prince is more faithfully discharged, and all kinds of occupations are rendered more pleasing and agreeable."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

As solid devotion absolutely requires that we fufil diligently the various duties of our vocation, whoever wishes to advance in virtue must centre on this his chief consideration and care.

We may be helped to fulfil this by the following practices:—First, by setting a great value and esteem on the duties wherein we may be employed by obedience. The energy of the will depends in a great measure upon the light of our understanding. "The beginning of wisdom," says the Wise Man, "is to have an ardent desire of it." Our will is a blind faculty, and can only pursue

(a) Phill. civ. 8.

what the understanding proposes to it. Hence, if we entertain a real esteem for our employments, we shall naturally be excited to perform them with great zeal and perfection, and readily undergo any labour and difficulty in fulfilling them; but if, on the contrary, we do not set a great value upon the offices which may be assigned to us, we shall become careless and indifferent in their performance.

Some religious are inclined to consider their duties as of little importance, or as contemptible and base. This is a very dangerous snare of the devil, and deprives those who are caught by it of all perfection and merit. We must be firmly convinced that all occupations in religion are noble and sublime; for what renders an action really valuable is, not its being esteemed and sought after by the world, but its being approved and esteemed by Almighty God. Moreover, the humbler the occupation appears in the eyes of men, the safer it is for us, for the farther it removes us from losing our merit through pride and vanity, and the better opportunity it affords us of practising mortification, and of advancing in perfection. A member of the Society of Jesus, when about to die, having been a tailor, called for his needle, and when he beheld it, was filled with consolation and hope, saying that he used to raise his heart to God, and make an act of love, each time he passed his needle through his work.

The second means is to use care and diligence in acquiring the necessary qualifications and instructions for the due fulfilment of any office assigned to us by obedience; for he who sincerely wishes to attain an end, must adopt and use the means suitable for it. One who is to become a missionary, must labour diligently to acquire as much sacred

learning as possible, must prepare his sermons and instructions well, and must collect all that knowledge of Catholic doctrine which may enable him to enlighten the minds and to move the hearts, of his hearers, as well as to refute error and defend the cause of truth. So also a brother who is to be employed in any mechanical art must labour to become as perfect as possible in his profession. And if all in their different stations would thus apply themselves to the acquisition of those qualities and endowments suitable and useful for their office, we should soon become perfect in every branch of charity, and capable of effecting much good.

A third means is, that as often as we perceive that we commit any fault in our duties, we should acknowledge it with great humility, and ask penance for it from the Superior. For if we allow material faults, which arise from a want of care and consideration, to pass by without notice, we shall quickly fall into great remissness and negligence, and at length come to look upon our duties as of little importance. Whereas, by humbly acknowledging our faults, and asking penance for them when we perceive any negligence on our part, we shall check the evil and prevent future relapses.

The advantages or disadvantages which arise from a faithful or negligent performance of our various occupations, may regard each particular brother, or the whole Society, or the faithful in the Church of Christ. 1. The great advantage which each brother will infallibly derive from an exact and perfect fulfilment of his duties, is a great increase of merit. It is a point of faith that every action we perform for God's sake when we are in a state of grace, obtains for us a new degree of merit, adds a new gem to the crown of glory prepared by

God for us in heaven. Our Saviour declares that even a cup of cold water given in His name shall receive its reward; but how much more will the different actions of obedience done in religion obtain? A good religious, by performing with all possible perfection the different employments of the day, may obtain great merits each hour, each moment of the day. Perfection does not consist in performing great and extraordinary things, but in fulfilling with fidelity the duties of his state; and he who punctually observes his rules and performs every duty with all possible perfection, will quickly attain great sanctity.

The venerable Berkmans became a saint merely by his fidelity to the duties of his state, by faithfully keeping the rules; and no doubt there are thousands now shining as bright stars in heaven, who reached that height of glory by the same way. On the other hand, the religious who performs his different actions during the day with carelessness and without internal fervour, is continually losing immense treasures of merit. Although he may fancy that he is advancing in virtue, although he may feel great sweetness and devotion in prayer, yet it is all a delusion, he miserably deceives himself. All perfection consists in fulfilling the holy will of God. Now God wills that each should comply with the obligations and duties of his state of life; and therefore he who neglects these, cannot possess any true and solid virtue or sanctity.

Another great advantage arising from the faithful performance of ordinary duties, is a great peace and order throughout the house. For when each brother strives to fulfil the office intrusted to his charge with diligence and care, every duty will be performed at the appointed hour, the whole house

will be well arranged, and throughout, great order, regularity, and peace will be maintained. Indeed the community will be a faint image of heaven, where the blessed are constantly occupied in praising their Sovereign Lord, each in his proper sphere in the various choirs and hierarchies, all united together in perfect love and harmony. But where negligence and indifference about daily duties creep in, there we shall find a picture of hell, where no order, but eternal horror and unhappiness dwell. For great is the confusion and uneasiness which arise from duties improperly and negligently performed. For example, if the minister does not perform his duty as he should do, the Superior must lose his time, which he might have employed in things of greater importance, in supplying for his negligence. The same is to be said of any other office: if a brother be careless in it, the Superior has to suffer great uneasiness, and to lose much valuable time, and so the whole house suffers. A third advantage arising from the due performance of our various duties, is the great edification this gives to strangers, and to all who may witness it. For to see so many religious living together, each one engaged in his separate office, fulfilling his duties in silence and recollection, must necessarily afford subject of wonder and edification to every beholder. But if, on the contrary, visitors see a brother performing any duty carelessly and with distraction, talking and laughing with others, and hurrying about without modesty, interfering with the employments of others, and without any sign of recollection about him, they must certainly be greatly disedified, and conceive very unfavourable opinions of the whole community. What we have said of religious is applicable, with due pro-

portion, to every class of society, to all persons who labour to fulfil with diligence and care the duties of their vocation.

TENTH DAY.

"He that feareth God neglecteth nothing." (a)—*The Wise Man.*
"Even actions little in themselves, become great when they are well done; so that a trifling work, performed to please God, is more pleasing to Him than more important performances done with less fervour. Wherefore particular care should be taken to do little things well, as they are easy and of continual occurrence, if we wish to advance in God's friendship."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

The holy mother St. Jane Frances of Chantal recommended, with singular care, exactness in little things, and reminded her sisters of those words pronounced by the Eternal Truth, "He that shall break one of these least commandments, and shall so teach men, shall be called the least in the kingdom of heaven." She taught them by word and deed to observe, with a most exact fidelity, all the least commandments of rule, ceremonies, and observances, which are very numerous in religious houses, and by which everything is done in good order. The more she advanced in age, the more punctual was she in these little ordinances and practices. When deposed from the office of superior, she was the first on the eve of the new year to give her cross, rosary, and pictures to the

(a) Eccl. vii. 19.

sister assistant for charge, drawing her lot like the rest of the sisters, and refusing any dispensation. She knelt down before the superioress for correction like the rest of the community. If any of the sisters, or the community in general, were told of a fault, she was the first on her knees to accuse herself of it, in whatever little way she might have failed therein, for she never approved of one accusing herself generally; and she was wont to say, that this was to perform a most solemn action without application, and in a careless and negligent manner. Her exact attendance to all the offices, and even to the extraordinary prayers, which are only permitted, and not prescribed by the rule, was truly wonderful.

"He that is faithful in little things," says our Saviour, "is faithful also in that which is greater; and he that is unjust in that which is little, is unjust also in that which is greater."(a)

"It can scarcely be credited," writes St. Teresa, "unless experience teaches it, how important attention to little things is for our own interests; it is also by means of little things that the devil pioneers the way, and makes a breach to admit what is of great consequence."

St. Francis of Sales was most particular in recommending fidelity in little things to all those who sincerely wish to advance in virtue. In his "Introduction to a Devout Life," he writes thus: "Prepare yourself to suffer many and great afflictions for our Lord, even martyrdom itself; be ready to give Him whatever is most dear to you, whenever He shall call for it,—father, mother, brother, spouse, children, even your life, for your

(a) Luke xvi. 10.

heart ought to be willing to make all such sacrifices to Him. But in the mean time, while divine Providence does not visit you with great and heavy afflictions, nor require of you your eyes, give Him at least your hair; that is, bear with meekness those slight injuries, those little inconveniences and trifling lossess which are of daily occurrence; for by so doing, for God's sake, you will completely gain His heart, and make it all your own. Yes, those little deeds of charity which you may daily practise, the annoyance from a headache, toothache, a cold, the ill-temper of a wife or husband, the contempt or slight of some neighbour, the loss of a ring or a handkerchief, the little inconvenience of going earlier to bed and rising earlier in the morning for the purpose of prayer and of preparing for the Holy Communion, the bashfulness we feel in performing certain acts of devotion in public,—in short, all trifling things, when submitted to for the love of God, become extremely pleasing to His divine bounty, who for only a cup of cold water has promised an eternal reward, that is something infinitely greater than the whole ocean, as compared with one drop of its waters. Now as such occasions are of daily and hourly occurrence, see what treasures of spiritual riches we may amass for ourselves, if we will but take advantage of them.

"When I read in the life of St. Catharine of Sienna the many ecstasies and raptures with which she was favoured, the sublime wisdom and even complete sermons contained in her writings, I had no doubt but that with such an eye of contemplation she had ravished the heart of her heavenly spouse; but I was not less delighted when I read also how she gave Him her hair, by employing herself in her father's kitchen, humbly turning the

spit, lighting the fire, dressing the meat, kneading the bread, and discharging all the lowest offices of the house, with an ardour overflowing with love and affection for God; and I esteem no less the simple meditations which she made in the midst of these low and abject employments, than her frequent ecstasies and raptures, which, it may be, were but the reward of her humility and abjection. The method of her meditations during these employments was to imagine that in preparing food for her father she was providing refreshment, like another Martha, for our Lord, that her mother held the place of our Blessed Lady, and her brothers those of the Apostles. In like manner she excited herself to serve in spirit, and with the greatest fervour, the whole court of heaven; and the assurance that in all this she was doing the will of God, filled her soul with ineffable sweetness. I have brought forward this example to show you how important it is to perform all our actions, however trivial, lowly, or servile, with a view to the service of God's divine majesty. In order to this, I would earnestly exhort you to imitate the valiant woman so highly commended by Solomon, who, although engaged as she was with great and important things, disdained not to take hold of the spindle. Do you, in like manner, frequently employ yourself in prayer and meditation, in frequenting the sacraments, in instructing and consoling others, in exciting them to the love of God, in the performance of all those excellent and important works to which your vocation obliges you; but forget not the distaff and the spindle,—that is, practise those little and lowly virtues which grow like flowers at the foot of the cross; serve the poor, visit the sick, take care of

your family, and attend to all your household affairs with such diligence as to preclude all idleness, and season all these employments with such considerations as did St. Catherine. Great occasions of serving God seldom present themselves; little occasions are always at hand. Our Blessed Saviour assures us, that "he that is faithful in that which is least, is faithful also in that which is greater," and that he shall be set over great things. Do all, then, in the name of God, and all shall be well done; whether you eat or drink, whether you sleep or take recreation, whether you are employed in honourable or abject duties, direct your intention towards God, and do all because such is His will, and you will gain much merit in His sight."

ELEVENTH DAY.

"He that contemneth small things shall fall by little and little." (a) —*The Wise Man.*

"Those who run into disorders and crimes of the worst nature begin at first by committing small faults, and no person ever falls or plunges himself all at once into an excess of wickedness." —*St. Bernard.*

THERE is a common saying which is perfectly true, and well grounded on experience, that, commonly speaking, none ever reaches at once the highest point of vice or virtue; but that good and evil gradually insinuate themselves, and grow

(a) Eccl. xix. 1.

insensibly in us. It happens in spiritual as it does in corporal diseases; both the one and the other increase by little and little, so that when you see a religious commit some great fault, do not imagine that his disease then begins, for none ever fall on a sudden into any enormous sin after having a long time led an innocent life; they begin by negligence in those duties which they consider as unimportant, then their devotion growing cold, their negligence increases daily more and more; so that at length they deserve that God should withdraw His hand; and no longer supported by Him, they easily yield, and fall under the first great temptation that attacks them.

Cassian explains this very well by a comparison taken from holy Scripture. Houses fall not to ruin on a sudden; but the damage first begins by some gutters out of repair and neglected, through which the rain entering, by degrees rots the timber that sustains the roof; in process of time it penetrates the wall, dissolves the cement, and at last undermines the very foundation, so that the whole building tumbles to the ground. "By slothfulness," says the Holy Ghost, in Ecclesiastes, "a building shall be brought down, and through weakness of hands the rain shall drop through."(a) "It is just so with us," says the same author; "a certain natural inclination which we have to evil first flatters our senses, then gains ground, and insinuating itself into our souls, shakes the firmness of our good resolutions, and at last so weakens and undermines the whole foundation of our piety, that the entire spiritual edifice falls in a moment. A little care and vigilance in the beginning might

(a) Eccl. x. 18.

have easily prevented the growth of the evil; but because we neglected it when it was small, and did not take care in time to correct such faults as appeared to us inconsiderable, we unfortunately ended by falling into serious defects and by yielding to grievous temptations."

It is for this reason that St. Gregory says that "small faults are in some manner more dangerous than great ones." And St. John Chrysostom writes thus: "I dare advance a proposition which will appear strange and unheard of. It seems to me that men ought to be less vigilant in flying from great sins than in avoiding small faults; for the enormity of great sins naturally excites in us a horror of them; but we are easily induced to commit small faults, because we fancy them inconsiderable; and the little account we make of them preventing us from endeavouring to correct them, they become at last so great by our negligence, that we are no longer able generously to resist and put a stop to them."

Whoever, then, is sincerely anxious to provide for his safety and to secure his eternal salvation, must be on his guard lest by slighting little transgressions he gets accustomed to them, and thus loses the horror of sin, and draws by degrees ruin upon himself. "It makes no matter," says St. Austin, "whether a ship be sent to the bottom by one great wave, or whether the water, entering by the chinks, sinks the vessel gradually." The devil cares not whether he enters the soul by this or that breach, all being equal to him, provided he attains his end, and brings you to a miserable shipwreck.

"You are armed," says St. Austin in another place, "and prepared to defend yourself against great sins; but what care do you take to avoid

small faults? Are you not afraid of them also? You have already thrown overboard those heavy bales which would have sunk your ship; but take care that the small heap of sand still in the hold does not bring you down." You have happily escaped all the storms raised against you in the tempestuous sea of the world; but take care you be not wrecked in the harbour of religion. For as it would avail nothing that a ship should have weathered all the storms, and escaped all the rocks at sea, if she is wrecked in port; so it would be of no advantage to you to have resisted all the assaults of the strongest temptations, if afterwards you yield to weaker ones, and thereby lose your soul.

Deeply impressed with this truth, the saints watched most carefully over their actions and the secret motions of their hearts, and studied to walk in holiness and justice all the days of their life, avoiding with great diligence all that is faulty and displeasing to God, whether great or small.

The venerable Benedict Labré was animated by this holy spirit from his earliest youth. One day, having gone into the garden, at his uncle's command, to gather strawberries for the table, a little girl of the house, about seven years of age, came to him and asked him for some of them. Benedict answered frankly that he could not himself give her any, but would do so if she went to obtain his uncle's leave. The girl, after going to ask for leave, came back, saying she had not obtained it; "nevertheless," she added, "give me some; your uncle will not know it." "If my uncle will not know it," answered Benedict, "God will see it." "What consequence will it be?" answered she; "I do not ask for many, two will satisfy me; it is a

little thing, you may do it." "A little thing! what do you say?" rejoined Benedict; "nothing that offends God can be a trifle. Besides, we begin by little things, and by degrees pass on to great: to-day it is only a few strawberries, presently things of greater consequence will be stolen. You yourself would steal a few pins one day, another day a pair of scissors; then you would not have difficulty in taking things of more consequence; from little things we go to greater. Be sorry for such an insinuation, and go to confess it as soon as you can." Nor was he satisfied with this; he reminded her of it when she was going to the church to make her confession.

It happened one day, that being in the country with some boys of his own age, his companions stole some apples from a neighbouring farm, and offered him a share; but triumphing over human respect, Benedict refused to receive any, saying, boldly, "These apples are stolen; it is not permitted you to eat them, and I will not have one of them." In like manner he refused some cherries from a companion, who had taken them unknown to his father.

TWELFTH DAY.

"Although he who has entered into religion, and is careful not to offend God, may imagine that he has done all, yet, O how many little defects remain, which conceal themselves from us until they have gnawed away our virtues! These are self-love, self-esteem, and the judging others, although for the most part it be only in little matters, and want of charity towards our neighbour; since, if even by dragging ourselves as it were, we satisfy our obligations, we do not yet perform them with the perfection which God requires of us."—*St. Teresa.*

"Give thyself up with all diligence to the acquirement of virtues, otherwise thou wilt always be destitute of them; and never believe that thou hast acquired a virtue, unless thou hast suffered temptations from its contrary, and hast purchased it on such occasions."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

DILIGENCE and care in acquiring virtues and rooting out vices is especially urged by the saints upon the young, because they are more susceptible of favourable impressions, and can more easily amend their faults, and plant virtues in their hearts.

St. Dorotheus explains this very well by an example he relates of one of the fathers of the desert, "who being one day with his disciples in a place full of cypress trees of every size, commanded one of them to pluck up a little one he pointed out, which his disciple presently did without any difficulty; when he pointed at another, somewhat bigger, he in like manner plucked it up by the roots, but with far greater difficulty, being forced to put both hands to it. To pluck up another, which was yet stronger, he was forced to use the help of one of his companions; and they all laboured in vain to pull up another,

which was much larger still. "Behold," says the ancient father, "how it is with our passions. In the beginning, when they are not yet deeply rooted, it is easy to master them, if we take but ever so little pains; but afterwards, when by a long habit they have taken deep root in our hearts, it is very hard to pluck them out; then we must use extraordinary efforts, and oftentimes shall not be able even then to attain our object.

St. Bonaventure teaches the same thing where he says: "The impressions we receive when young are seldom effaced; and he who in the beginning of a new kind of life contemns discipline, will not, without great difficulty afterwards, apply himself to it." "It is a proverb," says Solomon, "that the course of life a man has followed in his youth he will not leave when he is old."

St. John Climachus also says, "that loose and weak beginnings are very dangerous, this being an evident sign of a future fall." It is, therefore, of very great importance to accustom ourselves to virtue, and to be punctual in the performance of our duties in the beginning; which the Holy Ghost teaches us when He says, "that it is good to carry the yoke from our youth," because thereby the practice of virtue will become more and more easy; but if we do not practise it betimes, how shall we be able to find in our old age what we have not been careful to hoard up in our youth?

Those whom God calls to religion from their tender years have great reason to be thankful to Him; because then it is very easy to apply to virtue, and to submit to the yoke of religious discipline. It is easy in the beginning to bend a young tree, and make it grow straight; but if it grow crooked, and you let it alone, it will always

remain so; and you will sooner break than straighten it. It is the same in persons of a tender age. It is easy to make them take a good turn, and apply themselves to perfection; and being accustomed to it betimes, they will afterwards find therein a great facility, and always persevere in it. "How is it possible," says St. Jerom, "to bring back wool that is dyed scarlet to its first colour?" An earthen pot retains a long time the smell of the first liquor that is poured into it. And the Scripture praises Josias for having given himself to the service of God from his youth.

Humbertus, a person of note, and general of the order of St. Dominic, reports, that a certain religious, after his death, appeared in glory to another; and leading him out of his cell, showed him a great number of men clad in white robes, and encompassed with light, who carried very fair crosses upon their shoulders as they went in procession towards heaven. He showed him others who followed in the same manner, but who shone far brighter than the former, and carried in their hand far richer and more beautiful crosses. After that a third procession passed, still more glorious and admirable than the two former; for all their crosses were of a very surprising beauty, and instead of being carried by the men themselves, as the former were, either in their hands or upon their shoulders, each of these had an angel who carried their crosses before them, so that they went with a great deal more ease, and followed far more cheerfully. The religious, astonished at the vision, demanded its explanation; and the holy man answered, that the first who carried their crosses upon their shoulders were those who entered into religion advanced in years; the second, who held

their crosses in their hands, were those that entered young; and the last, who marched with so much ease and cheerfulness, were those who from their tender years renounced all the vanities of the world, and embraced a religious life.

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"The sacred Spouse in the Canticles says that his beloved ravished his heart with one of her eyes and one of her hairs. How are we to understand this? The eye is assuredly the most noble part of the body, whether as to its wonderful construction or its matchless activity, while the hair is comparatively of little or no consequence: but God would teach us hereby that the least and most insignificant of our actions are comparatively not less agreeable to Him than the greatest and most important; and that, in order to please Him, we must be as faithful in the one as in the other, inasmuch as, by such fidelity, we may by both equally gain His love."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"The devil, when he cannot prevail on us totally to abandon religion, strains every nerve to dissuade us from aiming at perfection, and to excite in us an indifference for small things, hoping at least to deceive us, by instilling into us a vain confidence that God, in consequence of such neglect, will not deprive us of His holy grace."—*St. Basil.*

It was for this reason that the saints were most anxious to keep up in its rigour the regular observance which they themselves studied to follow with great exactness. St. Liguori is reported to have often spoken thus to his religious: "The rule is so named because it ought to direct our actions. Every action which deviates from the

rule, however good it may appear to be, must necessarily be bad and out of place. My fathers, since we have agreed to it voluntarily, and have promised Almighty God to obey it, is it not a kind of perjury to transgress it, even in the smallest point? If we keep the rule it will preserve us; it is a bulwark which defends the soul, and saves it from the snares of her enemies. When the devil wants to make us fall into some great sin against God's law, he first tempts us not to attach any weight to the rule; many are out of the congregation, and perhaps loaded with sin, on account of their negligence in observing the rule." The blessed Nicholas Fattore evinced an equal zeal for regular observance. When superior he made not the slightest change in his mode of life, with the exception that he held himself obliged to be the most exact of all in the observance of the rules, to take upon himself the greatest share of toil, and to make himself in all things the servant of all the religious committed to his charge. It is inconceivable with what care and assiduity he saw that none of his subjects were left without those necessaries and little conveniences permitted by the rule and poverty of St. Francis, or the exquisite delicacy with which he attended to their wants, and this during the whole time that he was superior, which was for many years. In the different monasteries in which he governed he knew how to maintain perfect peace and mutual charity amongst the brethren, inspiring a filial confidence in all towards himself, so that they freely had recourse to him in all their necessities, both spiritual and temporal. He loved them all not only with a father's but with a mother's love; each one of them

felt persuaded that he was loved by him as much as if he alone enjoyed all the affection and solicitude of his heart. He was the first in the choir and at all other duties of the community. At recreation he was the most cheerful of all, and instead of allowing his rank to impose anything like disagreeable restraint on the rest, his familiar affability of manner, his amusing jokes, and simple hilarity, contributed to make every one cheerful and happy. He was most zealous on the point of strict regularity; but with the utmost discretion, prudence, and charity. He overlooked no failings; but corrected and punished them with such judicious gentleness, that even his very corrections convinced the delinquents that they were sincerely loved by their saintly father.

The venerable Father Segneri was another striking example of religious observance, so that as in the missions he was extolled as a saint by the people, and revered as an apostolic man, so in the house he was universally esteemed by his friends as an angel of peace and a true model of perfection. It was wonderful to see this servant of God, who passed the greater part of the year in preaching missions, and, according to his own expression, out of hearing of the bell,—to see him, I say, in the colleges and houses of probation, as regular and attentive in his conduct, as punctual and obedient as a novice in the heat of his first fervour, but with a sanctity greater than that of a novice; no one ever being able to detect him in the slightest infringement of religious discipline. We read the same of the venerable Father Dinamonti. It was astonishing to see in a man, who the greater part of the year was unaccustomed to the regular dis-

cipline of a religious community, such punctuality in the observance of all the customs and rules, the more mortifying as they were minute, without ever infringing any of them.

At the first sound of the bell calling him to any of the common duties of the community, he would leave a letter half-formed, if he happened to be writing, or if he were engaged in conversation would cut short a word, that he might without the least delay hasten to the place where obedience called him; and neither human respect, nor any important business, could induce him to delay one moment, recognizing in the sound of the bell the voice of God. This readiness appears to have been in him rather a second nature than a command of the will; so habituated had he become by constant watchfulness to observe with facility and delight regular discipline.

The last of his superiors in the noviciate at Florence confesses that he was struck with admiration at the punctuality with which he attended to the smallest regulations, never omitting, old as he was, to serve at table and in the kitchen on the day allotted to him, according to the custom of his order. Whenever he had on hand affairs of such moment as to require his absence from the first table, he went with great submission to obtain leave from the superior; nor would he accept a general leave, esteeming it a grievance and a hardship to be deprived of the inconvenience and humiliation of asking permission each time.

The venerable John Berkmans did not practise many austerities, but placed all his perfection in performing with great exactness his ordinary actions. His favourite maxim was the following: "Common life is my greatest penance;" and with its

observance alone he became most pleasing in the sight of God. The same is related of St. Stanislaus Kotska and others.

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"Unto the angel of the church of Ephesus write: These things saith He, who holdeth the seven stars in his right hand, who walketh in the midst of the seven golden candlesticks: I know thy works, and thy labour, and thy patience, and how thou canst not bear them that are evil, and thou hast tried them who say they are apostles and are not, and hast found them liars; and thou hast patience, and hast endured for My name, and hast not fainted. But I have somewhat against thee, because thou hast left thy first charity. Be mindful, therefore, from whence thou art fallen: do penance, and do the first works. Or else I come to thee, and will remove thy candlestick out of its place, except thou do penance." (a) "And to the angel of the church of Laodicea write: These things saith the Amen, the faithful and true witness, who is the beginning of the creation of God. I know thy works, that thou art neither cold nor hot. I would thou wert cold or hot, but because thou art lukewarm, and neither cold nor hot, I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth. Because thou sayest: I am rich and made wealthy, and have need of nothing, and knowest not that thou art wretched, and miserable, and poor, and blind, and naked. I counsel thee to buy of Me gold fire-tried, that thou mayest be made rich, and mayest be clothed in white garments, and that the shame of thy nakedness may not appear, and anoint thy eyes with eye-salve, that thou mayest see." (b)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"Tepidity is a spiritual infirmity which makes the soul languid in well doing, just as a slow fever parches by degrees even the most robust frames."—*Blessed Valfré.*

This saint bore the deepest hatred to tepidity, which he considered as a sort of pestilence in reli-

(a) Apoc. ii. 1-5. (b) Chap. iii. 14-18.

gious houses. He was accustomed to say that "in religious communities the tepid are the most troublesome to superiors, inasmuch as not failing in matters of great moment they can neither be dismissed nor severely reproved; and yet by doing everything distractedly, languidly and as if by compulsion, they do not afford, as they ought, either good example or edification to the rest." This holy man esteemed it to be almost a miracle for the tepid to become fervent: "The tepid," says he, "thinks he does enough by living in the grace of God, not firmly resolving to do all the good he can; and this is a most serious self-deception, since by this he loses by degrees his devotion, and after ruining himself he is often the ruin of his companions."

A young man, on taking the monastic habit, having begged of the blessed Valfré to give him some good suggestion for keeping clear of this pestilence, he satisfied the holy request by a long letter, in which he points out the marks of tepidity, the danger it brings with it, and the remedies most efficacious for its cure. "The marks of tepidity," says he, "are, to attach no importance to the counsels and admonitions of superiors and spiritual fathers, and under studied pretexts to use every mode of making the latter condescend to our desires. Frequently to change devout books, and to grow weary of those already read, and of meditations already made. To consider ourselves capable of conducting ourselves in the best possible manner, without help from others. To avoid occupations in accordance with our institute and office, that we may apply to those suiting our own inclination. Frequently to withhold ourselves from community acts without a solid reason. To call

to mind the conveniences left behind in the world, saying that we were better off in the house of our parents, and were equally able to save our souls there. To repeat, on every occasion, that we have for many years worn the religious habit, served the institute, and laboured for the benefit of the community. All which expressions evidently show want of fervour; for he who truly loves God, the more he has laboured the more he holds himself bound to labour, and the greater the number of years of his religious life, the greater his study is to come to perfection, knowing, as he does, that in proportion as the favours of Heaven increase, so ought our grateful correspondence to increase likewise. Tepidity brings with it the danger, first, of our losing the good merits already acquired in time of fervour; secondly, of our being abandoned by God, and consequently of falling into grievous sins; thirdly, of meeting with a miserable death in a state of spiritual languor."

Finally, the blessed Sebastian proposes for the extirpation of tepidity two remedies, namely, "that the tepid person earnestly entreat God to give him strength to escape from a state so deplorable; and that on his part he labour zealously, efficaciously resolving on a change which would be so much to the glory of God, so beneficial to himself, and so exemplary to others."

St. Liguori teaches the same, and considers tepid souls as attacked by a chronic malady which it is very difficult to cure. "Violent and acute ills," says he, "are easily overcome by remedies taken in time; it is quite otherwise with those which are habitual, though in themselves of a less serious nature. The same is true in moral things; a correction made in time affects the culprit, who,

seeing the serious nature of his fault, is able to regain his fervour; but no remedy is efficacious in recovering tepid souls, nothing can succeed in bringing them back to the exercise of Christian virtues." He one day observed: "The angel said to the bishop, of whom mention is made in the Apocalypse, 'I would that thou wert cold or hot.' I say the same thing, first to myself, and then to each of my brethren. I would rather, although I pray God never to permit such a thing, to see you cold or guilty of serious faults which pained you, than to know that you were in a state of indifference, and leading a life full of imperfections and negligences. If you were cold, there would be hope of your amendment; but if tepid, speaking voluntarily in time of silence, dilatory in doing what is commanded you, showing repugnance to all that humbles you, avoiding obedience, and endeavouring to cause your own opinion to prevail, there is cause, and very great cause, to fear that there would be much difficulty in correcting you, and that God in displeasure would take away His grace from you, and allow you to fall into some serious sin, and at last expel you from His house. The tepid person has only one new fall to make to cause God to reject him entirely. There are fervent spirits in the congregation; but there are tepid ones also, and the latter outnumber the former. My fathers, let us drive away tepidity; the tepid soul is an object of disgust to God; he is a burthen to the community and to himself. Let us reform ourselves, and betake ourselves to our former fervour, if we wish to please God, and to live a holy and happy life."

In another place he says that "the tepid Christian is like a sick man who has laboured under

many light maladies, which being incessant, have reduced him to such a state of debility, that as soon as he is attacked by any serious disease, that is, by a strong temptation, he has not strength to resist, and falls, but falls with greater ruin. Hence the Lord addresses the tepid bishop, saying, "Because thou art neither cold nor hot I will begin to vomit thee out of my mouth." Let him who finds himself miserably fallen into the state of tepidity consider these words and tremble. "Utinam frigidus esses!" St. Bernard says it is easier to convert a wicked layman than a tepid ecclesiastic. And Cassian adds, that he saw many sinners consecrate themselves to God with their whole heart; but that he knew no one who had risen from tepidity to fervour. St. Gregory holds out hopes to a sinner not yet converted; but he despairs of him who, after having repented, and given himself to God with fervour, falls into tepidity. In a word, tepidity is a desperate and almost incurable evil; for in order to be able to avoid danger it is necessary to know it. Now the tepid, when they have fallen into that miserable state of darkness, do not even know their danger. Tepidity is like a hectic fever, which is scarcely perceived.

Grievous faults, because they are more easily observed, are more easily corrected; but he who disregards light defects continues to commit them, and thus by the habit of despising minor transgressions he will soon despise grievous ones. Besides, mortal sin often excites a certain horror, even in habitual sinners, in moments of recollection; but to the tepid, his imperfections, inordinate attachments, dissipations, love of pleasure, or of self-esteem, cause no horror, and these little faults imperceptibly dispose him to ruin.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"Let your light so shine before men, that they may see your good works, and glorify your Father who is in Heaven." (a)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"Be ye blameless and sincere children of God, without reproof in the midst of a crooked and perverse generation, among whom you shine as lights in the world." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

As the members of the human body are so disposed that one gives assistance to another, so Christians, who are members of the mystical body of Christ, are called to assist each other in various ways, but especially by mutual edification.

The saints urge several reasons which should induce us to labour zealously to give edification to others, amongst which are the following:—

The first is the glory of God; for it is certain that the *extrinsic* glory of God is increased by the destruction of sin, the salvation of souls, &c., hence, if we are truly animated by the love of God, we ought to be all on fire to lead others in the path of virtue by any means in our power. When St. Francis Xavier went to the Indies, and found that merchants had penetrated these countries, excited merely by the hope of riches and worldly advantages, before the ministers of the Gospel, he could not refrain from tears, saying, that it was a shame that the men of the world should show so much greater zeal, for a little temporal advantage, than the ministers of God for the salvation of souls.

The second motive which ought to excite us to

(a) Matt. v. 16. (b) Philip. ii. 15.

give edification to all around us, is our vocation. We have been called to the Gospel, which is by excellence the religion of charity. Now what is charity? Charity means the kingdom of God in our hearts, by grace here upon earth, and by glory hereafter in heaven. Hence our vocation is to draw all men to God, to build up this kingdom of God in all hearts by spreading around us the fire of divine love, the good odour of edification.

The third motive, which ought to inflame us with zeal in giving edification to all, is the example of Jesus Christ. Our divine Saviour is the great captain and leader of all those who are engaged in this work of edification. His whole life, from the crib of Bethlehem to the cross on Calvary, was one continued chain of works of edification. He was all on fire with the ardour of His desires to extend the kingdom of His heavenly Father, to enkindle in the hearts of all men the flames of divine charity. "I have a baptism," said He, "wherewith I am to be baptized; and how am I straitened until it be accomplished." This baptism was that of His passion and death, whereby He was to give His very life and blood for man's salvation, to overthrow the power of Satan, and to found the kingdom of His church. To raise this kingdom He lived in poverty and obscurity, in the practice of every virtue; for this He called His twelve apostles, and sent them to convert souls to His love; for this He Himself spent the three last years of His life in instructing the people; for this He sent the Holy Ghost upon his apostles to aid them under all difficulties; in fine, for this He left those channels of grace, the holy Sacraments, and above all, the holy Eucharist, the sacrament of love. This example of our Saviour ought to in-

flame us with the most ardent zeal for His glory in the edification of our brethren; it ought to make us ready and willing to undergo any labour in so glorious a cause. The holy martyr St. Ignatius, seeing the beasts prepared to devour him, cried out, "Now I begin to be a disciple of Christ." He looked upon this act of giving his life for his divine master, in defence of his kingdom of justice, to be the happiest moment of his life.

The last motive I shall name, which ought to move us to great zeal in this work of edification, is the unceasing efforts and untiring ardour with which the enemies of Christ labour to destroy the reign of virtue and raise up that of sin. Those fierce enemies of God and man, the devils, are continually on the watch to ensnare poor souls, going about like roaring lions, seeking whom they may devour. And the world, by its false maxims, its wicked pleasures and promises, its corrupted examples, and its poisonous books, is continually drawing multitudes into perdition; it is continually fighting against holy church, and striving to destroy her children. This consideration ought to make us ashamed of our coldness and tepidity in the service of our divine Master.

This spirit of edification shone conspicuously in all the saints, not excepting those who had retired from the world and embraced a hidden and solitary life. Oh, how often did those pious souls who retired into solitude, in early times, to devote their lives to the contemplation and to the love of God, grieve in spirit over the frightful disorders which were committed in the world, and the grievous dangers and seductions which surrounded their brethren in the faith! for this cause they sometimes quitted their hermitages, abandoned the deserts,

and entered into cities, that, mixing with the crowd, they might employ their best efforts and skill to defeat the infernal enemy in his impious schemes. Theodoret relates, that in the time of the Emperor Constans, who was an Arian, and a favourer of Arianism, the great St. Anthony left the desert, and entered into Alexandria; going through the whole city and country, entering into churches and private houses, admonishing all persons to close their ears to the doctrines of the heretics, and to listen to St. Athanasius, who was faithfully proclaiming evangelical truth; and he adds, that these holy men knew well what was best adapted to the temper of the times; and judged when it was most suitable for them to remain in their quiet solitudes, feeding their souls in the delicious pastures of contemplation, and when they should better promote the glory of their Beloved by mixing in the throng of people and the uproar of cities. The same Theodoret also speaks of a holy monk, named Afraate, who came into Antioch to vindicate the divine honour, then trodden underfoot by the Arians. This servant of God, on being reproved by the Emperor Valens, himself infected with this heresy, for having left his cell, and told that it was his duty to have persevered in retirement in the exercise of prayer, made this reply: "Tell me, O emperor, if I saw from a distant retirement, where I was employed upon my own work, that some person was setting fire to the house of my own good father, what ought I to do? Ought I to remain shut up in my own retreat, without concerning myself about the matter? Should I not rather run to procure water, and do all in my power to extinguish the flame? This is exactly my case. Thou, O emperor, hast set fire to the

house of God, my most beloved and loving Father, and I am seeking in every direction for means to put out the fatal blaze."

Although all Christians are obliged to give edification, yet the ministers of Christ, and those who are charged with the exalted office of teachers or pastors of His people, are more strictly bound to it. Hence our Lord thus spoke to His apostles: "You are the salt of the earth. But if the salt lose its savour, wherewith shall it be salted? It is good for nothing any more but to be cast out, and to be trodden on by men. You are the light of the world. A city seated on a mountain cannot be hid. Neither do men light a candle and put it under a bushel, but upon a candlestick, that it may shine to all that are in the house."(a)

St. Francis of Assisi, taught by the doctrine and example of Christ, thus addressed his brethren whom he had chosen to preach the Gospel in various parts of the earth: "In the name of the Lord, go modestly, two and two, praying to God from your hearts. Let no idle or useless words be heard among you. Although you are travelling, your deportment should be as humble and as decorous as if you were in your cells; for wherever we are, and whithersoever we may be going, we have always our vocation with us; our brother the body is our cell, and the soul is the hermit, who dwells in it, to think of God and to pray to Him. If a religious soul does not dwell quietly in the cell of the body, the external cells will be of little use to him. Behave, then, in such a manner in the world, that whosoever may see or hear you may be moved to devotion, and praise our Heavenly Father, to whom

(a) Matt. v. 13-15.

alone all glory belongs. Proclaim peace to all men; but have it in your hearts as well as in your mouths. Give no one cause for anger nor for scandal; on the contrary, by your own mildness induce every one to feel benignly towards others, and draw them to union and concord. We are called to heal the wounded, console the afflicted, and to bring back those who err: many may seem to you to be members of the devil, who will one day be disciples of Jesus Christ."

On another occasion he thus spoke to them: "My dear children, it is God who has commanded me to send you among the Saracens, to make known His faith, and refute the law of Mahomet. Prepare yourselves, therefore, to fulfil the will of the Lord. To render yourselves worthy of it, take great care to preserve peace and concord among yourselves, as the ever-subsisting ties of charity. Avoid envy, which was the first cause of the loss of mankind. Be patient in tribulations and humble in success; which is the means of coming off victorious in all encounters. Imitate our Lord Jesus Christ in His poverty, chastity, and obedience. He was born poor, He lived poor, and it was in the bosom of poverty that He died. To manifest how highly He loved chastity, He chose to be born of a virgin; He took virgins for His first soldiers; He kept and counselled virginity, and He died in the presence of two virgins. As to obedience, He never ceased practising it from His birth to His death on the cross. Place your hopes in the Lord, He will guide and assist you. . . . My children, I entreat you to have the passion of our Lord Jesus Christ always present to your minds; it will strengthen you, and powerfully animate you to suffer for His glory."

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"The grace of God, our Saviour, hath appeared to all men, instructing us that, denying ungodliness and worldly desires, we should live soberly, justly, and godly in this world, looking for the blessed hope and coming of the glory of the great God, and our Saviour Jesus Christ, who gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"The life of a good religious man ought to be eminent in all virtues, that he may be such interiorly as he appears to men in his exterior. And with good reason ought he to be much more in his interior than he exteriorly appears, because he who beholds us is God, of whom we ought exceedingly to stand in awe, wherever we are, and like angels walk pure in His sight." —*Thomas à Kempis.*

Of St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi we read, that by the angelic purity and modesty which shone in all her words and gestures, and by the singular grace with which she performed all her actions, she gave the greatest edification. She was most meek and gentle, humble, obedient, and full of charity. She always showed a great esteem for her holy vocation, of which she spoke with much affection.

She conversed on the things of God with ease and pleasure. She used great care to lead the novices to speak of spiritual things; and so strictly did they observe this practice, that they would actually have thought it a great fault to introduce a conversation on the vain topics of the day.

She was always an exact observer of the silence prescribed by the rule, and wished it to be strictly

(a) Titus ii. 11-14.

observed by the others, declaring that a religious who did not delight in silence, could not possibly enjoy the things of God. If a novice spoke in silence time, besides the severe penance which she imposed, she herself observed silence with that novice when she might have spoken, saying, "I wish the rule to have its due." She said that, in the time of silence, it was well to consider the works which Jesus wrought in silence, from His twelfth to His thirtieth year. She moreover gave the following instructions to her sisters, for mutual edification:—"In spiritual works, the religious must be fervent, not seeking her own satisfaction, but being conformed to the will of God. Exterior works should be performed with humility and submission to the Superior. In all movements and works, interior and exterior, the religious must keep her eyes fixed with intense love on God, asking His help, nay, entreating that He Himself would work, speak, and act all in us, and offering every action to His glory, in union with the works of the Incarnate Word when on earth. The religious should consider her convent as a sacred place, where God especially dwells by His presence. She must see the image of God in all the sisters, and should any appear mean or imperfect, believe that she has some interior gift in which the Lord delights." "Oh! how great is the influence of good example," exclaims St. Liguori, "on those who behold it." A perfect religious does more good in a community by his example than the most eloquent sermons or pathetic exhortations. Men are much more affected by what they see than by what they hear, and being easily convinced that the thing is practicable when they see another perform it, they are strongly encouraged to undertake

the same. The fluttering of wings, of which the Prophet Ezekiel speaks when he says, that "he heard the wings of living creatures striking one against the other," is a type of the good example by which the Christian touches his neighbour's heart, and moves it to piety and compunction, and inspires him with an ardent desire of perfection.

St. Bernard declares that, at first when he entered into religion, the very sight of some religious who were full of zeal and charity, nay, even the remembrance of them when they were absent or dead, imparted so much comfort and joy to him, and so deeply impressed him with sentiments of tenderness for God, that oftentimes tears fell from his eyes in great abundance. "The memory of Josias," says holy Scripture, "is like the composition of a sweet smell made by the art of a perfumer." Such were the good religious of whom St. Bernard speaks, and such ought we endeavour to become, according to the words of the Apostle, "We are the good odour of Jesus Christ."

St. Catharine of Bologna thus speaks of the great edification which she derived from her religious companions:—"I did not merit the grace to live among such pure and good souls, of whom I must say that there was no emulation among them, except the rivalry of wishing each to be the most active in performing humble offices, and striving to excel each other in fervour; and I much doubt if a more perfect simplicity could be met with than that practised by these beloved souls, or a greater love for humiliation and mortification; their conversation was truly devout, without duplicity or distrust of each other; they were so exact, that they made the slightest failure in their duty a point of self-accusation."

This saint was wont to tell her religious that the chief ladder for mounting safely to heaven is that of the virtues, from which springs edification. She used to describe this ladder in the following terms :—" This ladder, my dear daughters, is composed of ten steps, which I think it very important for you to know. The first is spiritual cloister, that is, a separation of heart from everything worldly and secular, and particularly from relatives. This separation is the more necessary for one called to be the spouse of Jesus Christ, because of the difficulty, or rather the impossibility, of a soul still attached to the things of this world being able to acquire a true love of God ; for this love is too pure to be united with anything earthly. The second step is a great desire of hearing the voice of God, and a readiness in obeying it, not only when we hear it externally in public preaching and spiritual discourses, but still more when it speaks to us by secret inspirations at mass, or during the divine office, or in prayer, or at any other exercise imposed by obedience, according to the rules and constitutions of the order and the customs of the community. The third step is modesty, a virtue which is very necessary to all sorts of persons, whatever be their state in life, but more particularly to virgins consecrated to God, because it is the richest ornament and the surest defence of their chastity. The fourth step is the love of silence, of which the Apostle St. James says, ' If any man bridle not his tongue, his religion is vain.' The fifth step is kindness, that is to say, a gentle and kind manner of treating all sorts of people, even those who are worthy only of contempt. It is thus a religious imitates her divine Spouse, who makes His sun to shine upon the good and the bad ; and

it is in this way that she obtains from Him peculiar marks of His favour. The sixth step is diligence, which ought to be the inseparable companion of all your actions, as well those which are prescribed by your superiors as those commanded by the law of God. The seventh step is purity of intention, which requires you always to judge charitably, to interpret others' actions favourably, and to reject every suspicion disadvantageous to them. The eighth step is obedience; for if those who follow their own judgment are in a very perilous state, those who, on the contrary, easily and willingly submit to the will and judgment of others, and particularly of experienced persons, are safe from all illusions. The ninth step is humility, which the devil especially fears, because it makes the Christian, and particularly the religious, so like her divine Master, Who humbled Himself to death, even the death of the Cross. Finally, the love of God and our neighbour is the tenth step of this ladder, and completes it, because this virtue is the summit of perfection."

"O! how sweet and comfortable it is," says The Imitation of Christ, "to see brethren fervent and devout, regular and well-disciplined! How sad a thing, and how affecting, to see such walk disorderly, and practising nothing of what they are called to. How hurtful is it to neglect the intent of our vocation and to turn our minds to things that are not our business! Be mindful of the resolution thou hast made, and set before thee the image of the crucifix. Well mayest thou be ashamed, if thou lookest upon the cross of Jesus Christ, that thou hast not yet studied to conform thyself to His pattern, although thou hast been long in the way of God."

"O, how strict and mortified a life did the holy fathers lead in the desert! How long and grievous temptations did they endure! What frequent and fervent prayers did they offer to God! What rigorous abstinence did they go through, what great zeal and fervour had they for their spiritual progress! How strong a war did they wage with vice! How pure and upright was their intention with God! They laboured all the day, and in the night they gave themselves to long prayers; though even whilst they were at work they ceased not from mental prayer. They spent all their time profitably,—every hour seemed short which they spent with God; and through the great sweetness of contemplation, they forgot even the necessity of bodily refreshment. They stood in true humility, they lived in simple obedience, they walked in charity and patience; and therefore they daily advanced in spirit, and obtained great favour with God. They were given as an example for all religious, and ought more to excite us to make good progress, than the number of the lukewarm to grow slack."

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"Rejoice in the Lord always; again I say rejoice: let your modesty be known to all men. The Lord is nigh." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"The true way to advance in virtue and give edification is a holy cheerfulness. The cheerful are much easier to guide in the spiritual life than the melancholy. Excessive sadness seldom springs from any other source than pride."—*St. Philip.*

A CHEERFUL modesty has always been held by the saints as a great help to our spiritual advancement and to the edification of others.

St. Francis of Sales, in his entertainments with the Nuns of the Visitation, shows them the great merit and value of modesty by the following reasons:—The first is because modesty imposes a holy restraint upon our senses, and whatever lays us under restraint for God's sake is extremely valuable, and singularly agreeable to His Divine Majesty. The second is that modesty does not impose restraint on us for a little while, but always and in all places, whether in solitude or in company, and on all occasions, even in sleep. A great saint wrote to one of his disciples, enjoining him to repair to rest as modestly in the presence of God as that man would assuredly have done, to whom our Lord in His mortal life, should have given an order to lie and repose, before Himself. And though, says he, you do not see Him, nor hear the command which He gives you, comply with it notwithstanding, just as if you were to see Him;

(a) Philip. iv. 4, 5.

because He is unquestionably present, and watches over you while you sleep. O, my God! with what modesty and devotion should we go to rest, if we were to behold Thee before us! Beyond all doubt we should cross our arms upon our breasts with a great feeling of piety. Modesty therefore imposes a restraint upon us on all occasions, and during the whole of our lives, because the angels are always present with us, and even the Lord of Angels, God Himself, before Whom the heavenly hosts bow down in profound adoration. This virtue is moreover strongly recommended on account of the edification of our neighbour; and certainly the simplicity of a modest exterior has converted many, as in the case of St. Francis, who once passed through a city exhibiting such a modest deportment, that it induced many young persons to follow him, in order to receive his instructions. Modesty is a species of silent exhortation; it is a virtue which St. Paul recommends in the strongest terms, saying to the Philippians, "Let your modesty be known to all men."

Of the venerable Labré it is related, that it sufficed to see him to be moved to devotion and animated to virtue. Several persons, witnessing his humble, poor, and fervent method of life, and seeing so ardent and continual an exercise of prayer practised by a beggar, felt themselves urged to take greater care of their own souls.

But the modesty which is so much praised and recommended by the saints as most useful for edification, must be sincere without affectation, and accompanied by a holy cheerfulness. St. Ignatius, in the rules of modesty which he prescribed for his religious, insists especially on this point. "Let the whole face," says he, "wear an

air of cheerfulness rather than that of sorrow, or any other disorderly affection; and if a brother be disposed to gloominess and melancholy, he must strive by much virtue and docility to suppress and banish it, and study so much the more to show a pious cheerfulness."

St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi was most careful never to sadden any one; and when any of the nuns appeared sad she would say, "Calm your heart, my sister, for God does not shed His graces on sad souls." Her countenance, always cheerful and joyous, was never clouded by any accident; this was to be attributed especially to her constant practice of prayer, by which she had obtained the mastery of her passions, and such union with God as to live in the constant enjoyment of His sacred presence.

It is related of St. Macarius, that being one day in company with the other saint of the same name, and obliged to pass over the Nile in a barge, it happened that two tribunes were ferried over at the same time, having each a pompous equipage and great retinue to attend him. These officers, beholding the two saints in their mean garb at one end of the barge, and seeing the serenity, recollection, and peace of mind which shone from their faces, could not help extolling to each other the happiness of the life which these servants of God led. Accordingly one of them, addressing himself to the saints, said: "You are both happy, who are thus above the world, and tread it under your feet." "You speak as it were by a prophetic light," answered the saint, "in calling us *happy;* for the name of both of us is *Macarius*, which in the Greek signifies *happy.* But if you have great reason to say that those who have renounced all

things to consecrate themselves entirely to God are happy, inasmuch as they tread the world under their feet, we have also great reason to compassionate your unhappiness in being slaves of the world, and suffering yourselves to be mocked by it." These words of the saint made so deep an impression upon the tribune, that on his return home he resigned his commission, distributed his substance to the poor, and quitting the world, embraced a solitary and religious life.

But no one was more particular in recommending a cheerful modesty, or rather a modest cheerfulness for advancement in virtue and for general edification, than St. Philip Neri. He could not endure a downcast or gloomy person, because, as he said, spirituality is always injured by it; hence, as soon as he saw any one out of spirits, he instantly asked him why he was in such a mood, and sometimes he would give him a box on the ear and say, "Be merry!" He said that his long experience in the direction of souls had taught him that, in spiritual matters, lively and cheerful men were much more easy to guide than the dull and melancholy. Hence it was that he had a particular and marked leaning to cheerful persons. Two Capuchins came once to see him, the one an old man, the other young. Philip looked both of them in the face, and as it appeared to him that the young one had more spirituality than his elder companion, he determined to try if it were so, and that by his usual method of humiliation. It happened that the young Capuchin was guilty of a breach of good manners by spitting in Philip's presence, and the saint took occasion from that to give him a biting reprimand; nay, he pretended to be in a furious passion, and said, "What sort of manners

is this?—get out of my presence!—and he seemed as if he were going to hit him on the head. But notwithstanding all Philip's words and gestures, the young Capuchin was as merry and cheerful as before, and did not show the slightest sign of displeasure; but his melancholy companion showed by his looks how deeply he felt the mortification, though in reality it had fallen on his companion, not on himself. Not content with this, the saint bade the young monk take his cloak off, telling him he was not worthy to wear it; to which the young man replied, "Your reverence is master; I can go very willingly without my cloak, not only because I am not worthy to wear it, but because I am not cold, and above all because I have had a most capital meal this morning." The saint then played several other tricks with him, affecting great frivolity; but nothing could disturb the Capuchin's good humour, or tire his ready and willing obedience. At last Philip, looking fiercely at him, sent him away, without testifying the least affection for him; and the good friar departed as cheerful and patient as ever. They left the room; but when they had got to the bottom of the stairs, Philip had them called back again, and on their return, as soon as he saw the young man, he ran to him, pressed him to his bosom in a most ardent embrace, and caressing him in an extraordinary manner, gave him some blessed beads and other articles of devotion; and as he was going away he said to him, "My son, persevere in this cheerfulness, for this is the true way to advance in virtue."

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"According to Him that hath called you, Who is holy, be you also in all manner of conversation holy." (a)—*The Apostle St. Peter.*

"Let thy words be sincere, true, grave, and free from flattery. When with thy equals, never allow playfulness to exceed gravity, nor gravity to exceed kindness and humility. In her words the religious should be humble, modest, and in season cheerful, remembering that word of Jesus, *De omni verbo otioso*, &c.; and that it is also written, *Sermo virginis tanquam sermo Dei, rarus et prudens.*"—*St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi.*

Her conduct was in perfect accordance with her teaching. In conversation she found great delight to speak of God and spiritual things, and never would allow her daughters to converse on the things of the world, saying, "that a person consecrated to God by a solemn vow of chastity should not admit into her heart the smallest thought contrary to her religious profession." Much less would she have allowed them to talk of marriages, alliances, births, &c., which with her would have been a scandal not to be endured.

On one occasion, when the venerable Labré went to visit a convent at Monte Lupone, the reverend mother, being informed of it, went eagerly to speak to him. To see him, and believe him another St. Alexis, and, as it were, a portrait of Jesus Christ, was one and the same thing. The other nuns being sent for by the abbess, hastened to the parlour, and seing Benedict, were much moved to devotion, never being satisfied with looking at and

(a) 1 Peter i. 15.

admiring him. One of them seeing him standing all in rags, modest and quiet, said to him, compassionately, "Poor man." The servant of God, who had not before opened his mouth, now said, "Call those poor who are in hell, and have lost God for all eternity;" and in naming Almighty God he bent his head profoundly. These words made a great impression on every one. While he was taking refreshment, one of the nuns asked him, "What is the Abbate Mancini doing?" She expected to hear something regarding his health or employments. Benedict answered, "Loving God." "I know that very well," she said; and again put the question, "What is he doing?" "Loving God," repeated Benedict. Having perceived that the nuns flocked to the parlour, showing some good opinion and esteem of him, he took leave quietly and departed. They were all filled with astonishment and admiration at his extraordinary virtue, and greatly grieved at his hasty and sudden departure.

The venerable Father De Ponte used to say: "That tongue is earthly which speaks well of self, ill of others, and never of God. That tongue is heavenly which speaks ill of self, well of others, and always of God or for God."

Of the venerable John Berchmans it is said that he had a particular talent for rendering the hours of recreation useful, without being too serious and grave; indeed, his companions declared that one hour spent with him was as profitable to them as the hour they spent in meditation; whilst he, on his part, said that the conversation after dinner helped to keep him recollected until evening, and that the evening recreation prepared him for morning's meditation.

The blessed Leonard gave the following advice to a nun: "I will tell you the great secret of pleasing Jesus in your conversation. Always be the first to introduce holy subjects; do it, however, with judgment; listen, sometimes, to the common discourse; but in order to raise the tone, begin by degrees to mingle something sacred, but in so gentle a way, that Jesus will be always with you."

The blessed mother St. Jane Frances of Chantal was wont to say that the religious who is fond of useless conversation does not know what it is to converse with God. She wished, however, that according to the direction of their holy founder, St. Francis of Sales, the sisters should not speak continually of prayer at recreation, but should also treat of things less serious, and of indifferent subjects, which might conduce to innocent relaxation allowed by the rules.

On one occasion, when one of the sisters seemed unwilling to accommodate herself to this, the blessed mother said to her: "We must, my dear daughter, honour all that the saints have done; if you were a Benedictine, it would be our duty to explain to you the characteristic of the life of the great St. Benedict; but since you are of the Visitation you should understand the spirit of your holy founder, who was a saint, and yet his sanctity did not hinder him from being full of sweet joyousness at times of holy recreation, or from communicating it to others, and he would laugh heartily when occasion required it. I read, but a few days since, in holy Scripture, that Sarah said, respecting the miraculous conception of her son, "The Lord made me laugh;" and I reflected that the spirit of the Lord brings joy, and that since Pro-

vidence has made it necessary for us to eat, drink, sleep, and divert ourselves, we should say the Lord makes me drink, the Lord makes me eat, the Lord makes me sleep, laugh, and amuse myself; thus all would be done in obedience and in the name of the Lord. Be careful, my dear daughter, not to deprive your sisters of the liberty which the rule gives them, and be not too severe; provided the recreation be made according to the rule, be satisfied; superiors, when they have spent some time in transacting business, or in the parlour, or speaking with the sisters, would willingly give the time of recreation to entire recollection, but our sisters who have not moved from their choir or their cells, 'must unstring their bows,' as our Blessed Father said."

A striking pattern of a holy recreation, and such as especially becomes religious persons, is exhibited to us in the meeting of Saints Anthony and Paul in the desert. The first thing they did on their meeting was to fall upon each other's neck, embracing each other, and calling one another by their proper names, as if they had been of long acquaintance, and then they joined in giving thanks to God. When they had sat down together, Paul said to Anthony, "Behold here the man whom thou hast taken so much pains to seek, and who will return very speedily to dust; tell me, then, if thou pleasest, how mankind goes on; what is the present state of the empire, are there any still remaining who worship devils?" Whilst they were discoursing on these matters they perceived a raven alighting upon one of the branches of a palm tree, which descending gently, dropped a loaf of bread before them, and then flew away. "Behold," said St. Paul, "how our loving and merciful Lord

has sent us a dinner. It is now sixty years since I have received daily from Him half a loaf of bread, but upon thy coming, Christ hath been pleased to send a double portion." Then, after prayer and thanksgiving, they sat down by the edge of the spring, to take the meal which God had sent them; but not without an humble contention who should break the loaf, which they at last decided by breaking it conjointly. After taking a moderate refreshment they sipped at the fountain, and then returned to prayer and the praises of God, in which they spent the evening and the whole of the following night. The next morning Paul thus accosted Anthony: "I have long, brother, known of thy dwelling in these regions; and the Lord, long ago, promised me thy company; but as my time is now come to go to rest, according to my continued *desire to be dissolved and to be with Christ*, and as my race is finished, and the crown of justice waits for me, thou art now sent by the Lord to cover this body with earth, or rather to commit earth to earth." When Anthony heard this, with sighs and tears he entreated him not to leave him, but to take him along with him in so happy a journey. "Thou oughtest not," said Paul, "to seek thus thy own interest, but what may be for the good of others. It would be expedient, indeed, for thee to lay down this load of flesh and to follow the Lamb, but it is necessary to the rest of the brethren that thou shouldst continue here, to instruct them by thy example. Wherefore go, I beseech thee, if it be not too much trouble, and bring hither the cloak which was given thee by Bishop Athanasius to wrap up my body for its burial;" "which," says St. Jerome, "he asked, not that he who for many years

had used no other clothing but the leaves of the palm-tree, cared much whether his body was committed to the earth covered, or naked; but that Anthony, being absent when he died, might be less afflicted at his death."

NINETEENTH DAY.

"When a brother is sick, let him show much patience and humility, and give glory to God, and edify those who visit and attend him by his virtuous submission and words of piety in sickness, no less than by his good example when he is well; and so he will manifest to all that he looks upon sickness as a gift from the hands of his Lord and Creator, for sickness is not less a gift of God than health itself."—*St. Ignatius.*

"Sickness is a divine favour. It makes us know what we are. Here we find out who is truly patient, humble, mortified. In sickness, when the body is weak and mortified, the spirit is more inclined to raise itself to God."—*Blessed Paul of the Cross.*

This blessed man showed by his example the truth of his teaching. Those who saw him in his illness testify that from the peace and tranquillity with which he suffered, he appeared in bed like an innocent babe, lovingly reposing in the arms of Divine Providence, and it was well understood that those expressions, by which he showed that he looked upon his illness as a real favour from God, came from the depth of his heart. "I am willing," he said, "to remain thus all my life;" and to a person who asked him how he felt, he replied, "Let us thank God;" looking upon the pains of

sickness as presents and precious visits from the Lord.

This holy man used to give the following instructions to his religious: "In what regards bodily diseases, render an entire obedience to the physician; tell him your infirmities sincerely, with modest and clear expressions, and with all brevity; and having said what is necessary, cease to speak, and let him do what he will. Do not refuse remedies; but take them in the loving chalice of Jesus, with a pleasant countenance. Be grateful to your attendants, and take what they wish you to have. Remain in your bed as on the cross; Jesus prayed three hours on the cross, and His was truly a crucified prayer, without comfort from within or without. O God, what a great instruction! Beg of Jesus to imprint it in your heart. O what a subject is this for meditation!"

It is generally remarked by the saints, that sickness is no less a gift of God than health. This is evident if we consider, 1st, that sickness is the best means of impressing us with a deep sentiment of the vanity of the world and the shortness of life. In health we are apt to forget our mortality, the miserable condition of our nature, and to fix our affections upon this world and its pleasures; but sickness quickly undeceives us; and no doubt Almighty God often sends sickness for this very purpose, to show men the nothingness of this world, the emptiness of its pleasures, and the shortness and uncertainty of this present life.

2ndly. Sickness is a great gift, since it enables us to satisfy for our past sins. It comes to us directly from God, and is not of our own choice; and if received with humility and submission will enable us to atone in the best manner for our sins.

And, 3rdly, sickness is really a gift from God, since it enables us to practise the most solid virtues of patience and resignation to the will of God.

St. Vincent of Paul used to say, that if we knew the precious treasure which is to be found in sickness we should receive it with joy, as if a great blessing were granted to us. "My son," said an ancient monk to one of his disciples, "grieve not for thy sickness; but rejoice that God sends it to thee for thy benefit; for if thou art of iron, by fire thou wilt lose all rust; if of gold, by fire thou wilt be purified and perfected." St. Jerome relates that a monk was so tormented by some infirmity which he suffered, that he requested the Abbot John Egidius to obtain from the Lord the cure of his disease; but the saint replied, "Why will you reject so precious a treasure, a medicine which is to make your soul pure and perfect?" St. Felix, the capuchin, being ill, was advised to call upon the holy name of Jesus, that he might be freed from the dreadful pain which he suffered. "What say you?" answered the saint, "what advice do you give me? Would you have me invoke Jesus to set me free from that with which He has Himself thought fit to visit me? Far be it from me to follow such a counsel! These are not thorns, but bright flowers of Paradise, which the Lord confers upon His children." And he rejoiced and blessed God for giving them to him. Lastly, the venerable Avila thus addressed a weak and infirm knight: "In this our exile it seems most suitable for us to carry the cross after our Lord, who loved it so much as to die nailed upon it. Divine love is best exercised in infirmities which are painful to the flesh, and where there is less temptation to vain-glory than in health. Great were the

labours of our Lord whilst on earth, but His sufferings excelled them all. Be, then, thankful to God for your sickness, and render Him praises for having sent it to you."

Sickness being no less a gift of God than health, the sick person ought to take care to profit by it for his own advancement in virtue, and for the edification of others. He will be able to do so, 1st, by showing great Christian fortitude by bearing patiently and cheerfully the afflictions which God sends him. Those in health must exhibit an active fortitude in giving missions to the people, in teaching and instructing others, sparing no pains and enduring all labours for the sake of charity; but in sickness we must exhibit fortitude in a different manner; we must evince a passive fortitude, which is no less meritorious, no less pleasing to God, and edifying to others. 2ndly. By firmly believing that what has befallen him is most advantageous to himself, and most conducive to the glory of God, rejecting all thoughts to the contrary, namely, that he could have promoted the honour of God better in a healthy state by labouring for the salvation of souls. 3rdly. By the practice of obedience, both to his spiritual and corporal physicians, not pretending to direct himself in anything; but abandoning himself with simplicity to those whom God has appointed to take care of him.

O precious sickness, which opens the eyes of the soul, and shows us our true riches! O happy weakness, which raises us from earth to heaven! O blessed infirmities, which fortify the spirit as the body decays! But few, alas, there are who know how to profit by the loving visits which our Lord pays to His elect by sickness. Many are patient and cheerful while they enjoy health; but

no sooner are they attacked by illness than they become sad, angry, grieved, and almost inconsolable. Alas, how can they make any solid progress towards perfection amidst lamentation, complaining, and disquiet? It was by a very different road that the saints reached the holy mount of God. St. Jerome relates of St. Paula, that when she was once attacked by a violent pain and pleurisy, her countenance became so cheerful, and her speech so gay, that it seemed rather as if heaven was opened to her eyes, and that she really beheld her happy home. Of St. Romula, we are told by St. Gregory, that she was for many years confined to her bed by paralysis, and lost the use of her limbs; but during the whole time she never gave way to one single act of impatience, but became even more attentive to the practice of virtue in proportion as she became more unable to move. St. Philip Neri, in all his sufferings, which were long, frequent, and severe, always preserved his cheerfulness and his sweet countenance, and never spoke of his maladies, however grievous they might be, to any one but his physician. St. Clara endured for eight years the severest sufferings, and was never heard to complain; but continually rejoiced in the Lord. St. Vincent of Paul was afflicted with constant, varied, and severe sicknesses, during which he preserved his affability and serenity exactly the same as if he were in health; and in the most intense sufferings he turned his eyes to Christ crucified with interior aspirations, asking for strength, and animating himself to patience. When he mentioned them, he always spoke of them as trifling compared to what he deserved, and nothing to those which Jesus Christ had borne for him. Once a person who

was dressing one of his legs, which had been diseased for forty years, moved with compassion at seeing the swellings and ulcers, exclaimed, "O father, how dreadful are your sufferings!" The saint replied, "How can you call any work of God dreadful which is intended to make a sinner suffer? God forgive your words; you should not speak thus in the school of Christ. Is it not just that the wicked should suffer and be punished?"

TWENTIETH DAY.

"Whatever occupations thou mayest have, endeavour to do each action with as much perfection, peace, and composure, as if thou hadst nothing else to do. Mortify eagerness to finish one action in order to pass quickly to another, and also overcome any and every immoderate desire, unless thou wishest thy work to be ill done."—*Venerable De Ponte.*

"Amongst impediments to our good works, the first is that, while doing one thing, we think of another already done, or about to be executed. By this means one operation obstructs another's good. The method of doing all well is to attend to one thing at a time, and in the most perfect way, excluding the thought of anything else, until the first undertaking be accomplished."—*Venerable Father Avila.*

THE blessed mother Jane Frances of Chantal used to say to her spiritual daughters: "That which God requires from you do faithfully at the moment, leaving the care of everything else to His providence. Be assured that by acting thus a great calm will ensue." This was her own mode of acting. This was also the practice of St. Francis of Sales, of whom it is said that, when he

undertook any affair, he attended to it as if he had no other business in the world.

St. Gregory Nazianzen, praising his mother, says that she devoted herself so entirely to her work as to succeed in a manner wonderful to behold. Seeing her in domestic affairs you might suppose she had no other duty, and when she minded spiritual things, all else appeared to be forgotten; her attention, in fine, seemed concentrated on the business in hand.

The venerable sister Mary Crucifixa, while attracted by a spirit of heavenly contemplation, was appointed at the same time, by her superioress, to various active offices, such as sacristan, cellarian, cook, refectorian, and occasionally, portress. Nevertheless, she managed to perform all these duties satisfactorily, without neglecting her contemplation; this she did in the following manner. In the sacristy she said to herself, "think only of what you have to do as sacristan;" and in a similar way she conducted herself in every office.

St. Ignatius of Loyola, taught by his own experience, was very particular in urging on spiritual persons the importance of fixing all their attention on the present time, doing all their actions well, and taking every opportunity of advancing in virtue without troubling themselves with thoughts of the future. He used to say: "Never let any opportunity pass by of laying up a store of merit; but from every occasion endeavour to procure some spiritual gain: as, for instance, from any little angry word which any one may say to you; from an act of obedience which you are enjoined to perform contrary to your will; from any opportunity which may be offered to you to humble yourself; or to practise charity, mildness, patience, and

such like virtues; all these occasions are so many invitations to increase your spiritual gains, and you yourself ought to make it your object to seek for them, and to purchase them; and on those days on which you obtain the most of these you ought to go to bed with greater joy and alacrity, just as the merchant does on those on which he has succeeded in making most bargains; because on such days his trade has prospered."

One of the principal maxims which the venerable Berchmans had constantly fixed before his eyes was, to force himself to merit in everything he did, and never to suffer an opportunity to escape, however trifling it might be, that could possibly be to him a source of spiritual profit; so that he made it his grand object to seek after such opportunities; and all that were thrown in his way by others he embraced with courage and great delight, never reflecting upon their indiscretion or want of virtue, but attending only to his own spiritual good. By these means he became a saint, which was his only desire.

St. Mectildes once saw in a vision our blessed Lord attended by many saints, of whom one said to her, "Oh, how blessed are you who are still on earth, on account of the many opportunities which you have of heaping up merit! If man did but know how much he could merit every day, how joyful would he be at the morning's dawn that he had been granted another day in which he could live to God, and with His divine grace so greatly augment his own merit and the honour and glory of his adorable Saviour. How would this thought strengthen him, and fill him with a burning ardour to do and to suffer all things with the most lively joy of his heart."

"All things have their time," says the wise man.(a) Let us, then, not confound or disturb the order of duties; but let us remember our Saviour's words: "Sufficient for the day is the evil thereof."(b) Each day's disquiet and care is sufficient to engage our thoughts without thinking of evils to come. Plutarch relates that while the heathen priests offered sacrifices, there was one appointed to cry out continually with a loud voice: *Do what you do:* as if he would say, think of nothing else but what you are doing, distract not yourself, but apply your mind wholly to your business. It is by a similar means that you will do all things well. Apply yourself closely and entirely to one action at a time, as if you had nothing else to do; attend only to this, apply to it with all your care; banish all other thoughts, and you will never fail to do what you do well. "Let us do what we are about at present," said Aristippus, "without thinking either of what is past or to come;" let us apply ourselves wholly to the present action, because that alone is in our power; what is to come is so uncertain, that we cannot answer whether it will happen or not. How happy should we be if we could gain so much control over ourselves, and were so much masters of our thoughts and imaginations as never to think of anything but what we have at hand.

(a) Eccl. iii. 1. (b) Matt. vi. 34.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"Let all things be done decently and according to order." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Beware of hurry, which is a capital enemy of true devotion. Never is work well done that is done with eagerness and hurry. 'Make haste leisurely,' saith the old proverb. 'He that is in haste,' says Solomon, 'is in danger of stumbling.' And again, saith another proverb, 'What is done well enough is done soon enough.' Drones make much more noise, and are in much greater hurry than bees, but they make only wax and no honey; so it is with those who hurry themselves with eager anxiety and noisy solicitude, they do but little, nor do that little well."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. Vincent of Paul used to say, "God's works are mostly accomplished by degrees. They have their beginning and their progress. Everything is not to be done at once and hurriedly. Do not imagine all to be lost if success is not immediately obtained; it is expedient to advance by slow marches, to pray much, and to employ the means suggested by the spirit of God, and ever to reject the false maxims of the world."

This saint was accustomed to proceed so quietly in prosecuting his affairs that he was considered too slow; but experience proved that his slowness was most profitable for the execution of most important works; for, to the general astonishment, he succeeded in several enterprises that would have baffled the combined exertions of many.

The venerable Mary Margaret thus wrote to a spiritual person: "In all your actions avoid haste and eagerness, endeavouring to form your exterior

(a) 1 Cor. xiv. 40.

as well as your interior upon the model of Jesus Christ. Always act with the same tranquillity as if the present action were the only one you would have to perform, and the last of your life. How great would then be the purity and fervour of your soul!"

And as hurry often arises from anxiety of doing too much at once, the saints warn spiritual persons against this anxiety, as a great obstacle to doing well our good actions and increasing in true devotion.

St. Francis of Sales, in "The Introduction to a Devout Life," writes thus: "Flies trouble us by their numbers, and not by their strength; so a multitude of trifling affairs often trouble us more than others of greater importance. Take in hand your affairs, then, with calmness and evenness of mind as they occur, and attend to them in order, one after another; for if you attempt to do all at once, and in confusion, you will so oppress and exhaust yourself that you will, in all probability, sink under the burden and effect nothing." And in another place he says: "In order to make great progress in perfection, we should endeavour to attach ourselves to one thing at a time, to one book of devotion, to one spiritual exercise, to one virtue, to one ejaculation, and so on; not, indeed, that we ought to reject and abandon all other things, but we ought to take care that this practice or virtue to which we apply ourselves should be the most constant object before our eyes, and the principal end of our actions, so that when occasions for other virtues present themselves we should look upon them rather in the light of accessories. To act otherwise, to go perpetually from one exercise to another, is to follow the example of those who, at

a feast, taste something of every dish, and thus ruin digestion; it is, moreover, a constant study, without ever arriving at the knowledge of the science of the saints, and thus ends in the loss of tranquillity of soul, which is that one thing needful which Mary chose. On the other hand, we must guard against a vice into which not a few fall; that is, attaching ourselves too much to our own peculiar practices and spiritual exercises, which naturally makes us feel a certain disgust for all other practices which are not exactly conformable to our own; imagining that we do that which is right, and thinking imperfect those who do not follow exactly the same plan. He who has the right spirit derives edification from all practices, and condemns none."

An anchoret, after having a long time persevered with diligence and fervour in devotion, became so negligent in the discharge of his spiritual exercises that he fell into a state of tepidity and indifference; at length, desiring to recover his former fervour, he imagined that all the avenues to it were closed against him, and knew not where to begin. Upon which a good father, to console and encourage him, told him this parable. "A certain man having a field which was all overrun with briars and thorns, sent his son to stub and clear it. The young man, perceiving the laborious task imposed upon him by his father, lost courage, and fell asleep the first day, and the second he did the same, for which his father reprehended him severely, and said: 'Son, you must not look upon this work as if you were to do it all at once; but you must undertake every day as much as you can easily perform.' The son followed his father's advice, and in a short time the whole field was cleared."

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"I would have you to be without solicitude." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Be diligent and exact in all the affairs with which you are charged, but if possible avoid all disquietude and anxiety, because this perturbs our reason, and hinders us from performing well those other things which do not trouble us. Great affairs do not disturb us so much as the little ones, when they are in great number. Strive then to undertake these also with peace, and perform them in their proper order, one after the other, without uneasiness, and thus you will perform them in a meritorious way. For when working peacefully we work most usefully."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This saint thus wrote to one of his penitents who was longing after perfection:—"He who can preserve tranquillity and peace in a multitude of affairs is almost perfect. And although few are to be found even in religion who have attained to this degree of happiness, yet there are now, and at all times have been, some; and we ought to aspire after it."

This counsel was faithfully followed by St. Jane Frances of Chantal. She was attentive to everything, but without anxiety, and thus peacefully succeeded in her undertakings, as she assured her daughters. To one of them she said: "Know, my dear child, that I perfectly love our poor congregation, but without solicitude; love seldom exists with anxiety." To another, who asked her for some remedy under continual embarrassments, she wrote as follows:—"The origin of your complaint proceeds from anxiety to obtain a desired

(a) 1 Cor. vii. 32.

good, and from your defective submission to the will of Him who alone can grant what you wish. Hence, to lighten your burthens, you must curb this solicitude by endeavouring to do what you do faithfully, and at the same time with suavity of mind."

The following was a favourite maxim of the venerable Father De Ponte:—"We act as God does when we do good with peace and without perturbation; with love without self-interest; with magnanimity without presumption." And St. Vincent of Paul was used to say: "It is the property of God's spirit to work with sweetness and love; and the surest means of success is to imitate this spirit."

This saint was himself much distinguished for his evenness of mind. He was never disturbed by a multitude of affairs, however difficult, but went methodically to work, keeping God's will ever in view. This was remarked when, besides being a member of the royal council, he had to direct his congregation and many other communities, so that any one would have thought him distracted and overwhelmed with many cares. But, in the midst of such a variety and crowd of occupations, he was at all times collected and self-possessed, and as calm as if he had only to attend to one affair.

We must not, however, confound the spirit of tranquillity and peace, so much recommended by the saints for the perfect performance of our actions, with want of diligence and care. "There is a great difference," writes St. Francis of Sales, "between attending to our affairs with care and diligence, and being solicitous and troubled concerning them. The angels attend to our welfare with all care and diligence, but without solicitude or trouble. Care

and diligence are part of their charity, and are exercised by them in our regard with tranquillity and peace, but anxiety and trouble are utterly incompatible with their state of felicity, and can never for a moment disturb them.

"Be therefore careful and diligent in all the affairs which God has committed to your charge, for such is the will of God; but be not solicitous nor troubled; yield not to anxiety, uneasiness, or hurry; labour not with over-eagerness; for you would thus disturb both your reason and judgment, and unfit yourself for doing that well about which you are anxious. When our Lord reproved St. Martha He said, '*Martha, Martha, thou art solicitous, and art troubled about many things.*' (a) Had she been merely diligent, she would not have been troubled; but being overconcerned and disquieted, she hurried and troubled herself, and it was for this that our Lord reproved her. Rivers which flow gently and regularly through the plains, bear along large vessels and rich merchandise; and rain which falls gently on the land, makes it fruitful in herbage and corn; but torrents and rapid rivers overflow the land, destroy all before them, and are useless for traffic; and heavy, tempestuous rains lay waste the meadows and corn-fields."

(a) St. Luke x. 41.

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"My heart is ready, O Lord, my heart is ready." (a)—*Holy David.*

"It is necessary to begin with a vigorous and constant resolution to devote oneself entirely to God, protesting to Him in a tender and affectionate manner, from the bottom of our heart, that for the future we will belong to Him without any reserve, and afterwards to make frequent renewals of this same resolution."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This practice of making from the beginning a firm resolution of devoting ourselves entirely and unreservedly to the service of God, with a determined will to apply ourselves earnestly to the practice of virtue, is absolutely necessary, that we may succeed in performing well our actions. The reason is, because the affair of Christian perfection is not a business to be done by constraint; it is the heart which must undertake it. Speaking to the young man in the Gospel, our Saviour tells him, '*If thou wilt be perfect;*' in order to show us that the root of perfection is in our will. For if we have not a sincere desire of becoming perfect, all the care and attention of our Superiors will avail nothing. Here we may find the answer to the question put by St. Bonaventura, Why was one Superior sufficient formerly for a thousand religious, nay, for four or five thousand, who, according to St. Jerome and St. Austin, lived under one Abbot; and now-a-days one Superior is scarcely sufficient for ten religious, nay, even for a smaller number? The reason is, because formerly the religious cherished

(a) Ps. lxvi. 8.

an ardent desire of perfection, and with this fire in their hearts, they applied themselves with all possible zeal to their spiritual advancement. "The just," says the Wise Man, "shall shine, and shall spread like sparks of fire among reeds." The metaphor here used by the Holy Ghost clearly shows with what ease and speed just men advance in the paths of virtue, when their hearts are once inflamed with this divine fire. Being animated by this spirit, those holy hermits needed no Superior to spur them on in their duties, but they rather needed one to moderate their zeal.

The sister of St. Thomas Aquinas once asked the holy doctor "how she could save her soul?" He replied, "by willing it." This answer is applicable to every one who cares about his salvation. If we sincerely wish it, we shall not fail to attain it. All depends upon our willing it seriously and earnestly; for if we wish it sincerely, we will strive to advance in virtue, we will exert ourselves with all diligence to render ourselves perfect, and thus we will secure our eternal life. This doctrine is conformable to a rule laid down by St. Ignatius in the beginning of his Constitutions: "It is," says he, "the interior law of charity, and of the divine love imprinted in our hearts by the Holy Ghost, which ought to support, guide, and make us advance in the way of God's service." It is this fire of His love, this insatiable desire of His greater glory, which ought continually to urge us to elevate ourselves towards Him, and make us advance in virtue. This desire once truly imprinted in the soul, makes us exert ourselves with fervour and diligence to attain what we wish for. For we are naturally active in seeking and finding out the things we have an inclination for; and it is for this reason

the Wise Man says, "The beginning of wisdom is to excite in our hearts an earnest desire thereof." But in this we find another advantage also, which renders this means very efficacious; for let the duties be ever so difficult in themselves, a strong attachment to them makes them easy and sweet.

Moreover, the earnest desire of perfection, and the firm resolution of devoting oneself to the practice of virtue, are effectual towards moving the heart of God to bless us, and to bestow upon us His choicest graces. St. Ambrose says that the Lord is so well pleased with the man who feels this longing desire, that He fills his soul with graces and favours; and in support of this assertion, he quotes these words of the Blessed Virgin in her canticle: "The Lord hath filled the hungry with good things." The royal Prophet had said the same before: "The Lord has filled the empty soul, and has satiated the hungry and thirsty soul with good things."

An angel appeared to Daniel, and told him his prayers were heard, because *he was a man of desires*. The desire David had of building a temple was so pleasing to God, that though He did not permit him to carry his design into execution, yet, as if he had executed it, the Lord rewarded him by confirming the crown to his posterity. In fine, Zacheus having an earnest desire of seeing the Redeemer, Jesus looked up to him in the sycamore tree, saying, "Zacheus, make haste and come down, for this day I must abide in thy house."

But the truth of this maxim is still more clearly set forth by Solomon, who, speaking of wisdom, which is nothing but God Himself, says: "Wisdom is easily seen by those that love it, and is soon

found by them that seek it." But do you know with what facility it is found? "It preventeth them that covet it, and it showeth itself first to them." It is at hand the moment you wish for it. "He that rises early to seek it shall not go far before he meets it; he shall find it sitting at his door."(a)

Such was the method inculcated by St. Philip Neri for the acquisition of perfection, and he himself practised it diligently. The venerable John Berchmans, from the first moment that he entered into the religious state, planted in his heart a real determination to become a saint, and afterwards not only kept up his pious practices and resolutions, which he had undertaken to this end, but also every day applied himself with fresh vigour to his spiritual advancement.

As a holy religious was undertaking to give the spiritual exercises to a religious community in Rome, a certain nun, named Sister Mary Bonaventura, who lived a worldly life, declared her unwillingness to be present at them. At length, after many entreaties, the father induced her to attend, and, even at the first meditation on the end of man, she was so affected, that he had no sooner finished than she called him and said, "Reverend father, I desire to become a saint, and that too as soon as possible;" and having withdrawn into her cell, she wrote these same words on a piece of paper, which she fastened to the foot of her crucifix, and from that moment she devoted herself with such fervour to the exercise of perfection, that when she died, eleven months after, it was judged proper to write her life for the edification of the sisters.

(a) Wisd. chap. vi.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"We ought every day to renew our resolution, and excite ourselves to fervour, as if it were the first day of our conversion, and to say: 'Help me, O Lord God, in my good resolution, and in Thy holy service, and give me grace this day perfectly to begin; for what I have hitherto done is nothing.' According as our resolution is, will the progress of our advancement be; he who would advance much has need of much diligence. If he that makes a strong resolution often fails, what will he do who seldom resolves at all, or weakly?"—*Imitation of Christ.*

"Account the past as nothing, and say with David, 'At this present do I begin to love my God.'"—*St. Francis of Sales.*

This was accomplished by the apostle St. Paul with a particular care. Although after his conversion he had become a vessel of election, full of the spirit of Jesus Christ, he yet availed himself of these means to persevere and advance in the way to heaven; thus, writing to the Philippians, he says: "Not as though I had already attained, or were already perfect ..... but one thing I do, forgetting the things that are behind, and stretching forth myself to those that are before, I press towards the mark, to the prize of the supernal vocation of God in Jesus Christ. Let us, therefore, as many as are perfect, be thus minded."(a) It was thus, also, that the glorious St. Anthony walked, urging himself on to virtue day by day. St. Athanasius writes of him, "That he considered himself always as a beginner, as if each day had been the first in which he began to serve God, and as if during all the past he had done nothing well, and that now for the first time

(a) Phil. iii. 12-15.

he set his foot in the way of our Lord, and made now his first step towards heaven." And this was the very last piece of advice that he gave his monks when he was at the point of death: "My children," said he to them, "if you wish to make progress in virtue and perfection, consider every day that you are then for the first time (as it were) beginning, and act always with the same fervour as on the first day you began." Thus, also, we find that St. Gregory, St. Bernard, and St. Charles Boromeo acted and advised others to act. These holy men, in order to render more clear unto all the necessity and advantage of this means, made use of two beautiful similitudes, saying, that in this respect we ought to follow the example of travellers who do not consider how much of their journey is accomplished, but how much still remains, and thus urge themselves to proceed; and that of the merchants of this world, who being wrapped up in the accumulation of riches, make no account either of what they have gained up to the present time, or of the troubles which they have undergone, but exert all their powers, both of body and mind, to make new gains, and to multiply their store every day, as if hitherto they had neither laboured nor gained anything.

An ancient religious, asking the Abbot Agatho how he should behave himself in religion, the good abbot answered, "That he should remember how he had behaved the first day he left the world, and was received into the monastery; and that he should continue to do still as he did then." These words contain another excellent means for persevering faithfully in the practice of virtue by the diligent performance of our duties. Let us reflect on the disposition in which we were when, at

the beginning of our conversion to God, we first determined to abandon for ever the way of sin and to devote ourselves in good earnest to the practice of virtue; let us consider with what courage we then undertook the subdual of our passions; with what zeal we renounced all sinful gratifications; and then let us take care to continue in the same disposition. Let us endeavour, to the utmost of our power, to do the same, and then we shall certainly succeed in performing our actions well, and make sure our calling and salvation.

Of St. Bernard it is said, that he believed that all other religious had arrived at the height of perfection, and being come to the end of their course, might very well dispense themselves in many things; but as for himself, he always imagined that he was as yet but a novice, and that it was not for him to take the same liberty, nor to use the same privileges, which others might do, and for that reason he never abated anything of the exactness and rigour of his rule, nor exempted himself from any of the meanest offices of his monastery. He was always the most forward in doing whatever obedience prescribed; the first in sweeping the cloister, the first in washing the dishes, and when it happened that he was not well versed in any duty, or could not do something he saw others do, he presently endeavoured to repair that defect by taking some other work in hand that was far meaner than what his brethren were employed in. He either took a spade to dig the garden, or an axe to cleave wood, which afterwards he carried to the kitchen, and took great delight in these offices because he really believed he had very great need of practising them for his spiritual advancement.

The Wise Man says: "When a man shall have finished his task, then he shall begin anew;"(a) namely, the more the true servants of God advance and approach to their end, which is perfection, the more they increase in fervour, and redouble their activity.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"Let all consideration begin from thyself, lest by busying thyself too much about others, thou neglectest thyself."—*St. Bernard.*

"If you wish in good earnest to make progress in spiritual things, you must endeavour to follow exactly the counsel of the Apostle, 'Take heed to thyself.' This contains two pieces of advice: the first is, not to meddle with the actions of others, nor to regard their failings; for he hath indeed no small task who would perform his own actions well, and correct his own faults. The second is, to endeavour with all diligence to perfect ourselves in virtue, and to attend to this incessantly, without considering whether the eyes of others are fixed upon us or not; because perfection so peculiarly belongs to each individual, that although many who now live together in one and the same religious profession, company, family, or village, are said here to form only one body; yet in the next world it is certain that each one will be judged by himself, and will have to render an account of his own spiritual advancement and failings."—*The Holy Abbot Pastor.*

A SINGULAR example of this care for himself was given by that holy youth, the venerable Berkmans, who, from the very first moment that he entered the Society of Jesus, made it his object to become a saint; so that from that time forth

(a) Eccl. xviii. 6.

he looked upon this as his grand point, and as it were his only and most important affair; and this he kept in view and practised as long as he lived, with the utmost diligence and care; on which account he never stayed to reflect why others did or said such and such things, and whether they did them well or ill; nor did he ever engage himself in defending one person at the risk of displeasing another; but he suffered all quietly to perform their own actions and to mind their own affairs. And as for the failings of others, he minded them so little, that even though they were committed in his presence, he did not perceive them, through his care for himself. So that it is said of him, that he never knew the defects into which others fell. All his object was to correct his own failings, and to perform his own actions well. And, moreover, the diligence with which he used to keep his own soul from defects was extraordinary; for, besides going well through his daily examinations of conscience, and a most rigorous retreat of one day in each month, he often, with great earnestness, entreated both his superiors and his companions to keep their eyes upon him, and frankly to tell him whenever they saw him fail in any point; and when any one gave him any such notice, he regarded it as a singular kindness, and he offered up particular prayers for him, whoever he might be.

Similar to this ought to be the conduct of those who sincerely wish to advance in virtue, and to fulfil diligently and faithfully their various duties. They ought to look steadfastly upon themselves, search diligently the secrets of their own hearts, discover their own faults, and apply themselves earnestly to amend them, without concerning themselves with the doings of others.

A holy man, who had resolved to consecrate himself to God in religion, being once deeply recollected in God, thus asked our Saviour: "Lord, when I shall have joined that order, what mode of life shall I follow to be most agreeable to Thee?" And this is the answer he received: "Lead the usual life; enter into no particular intimacies with your brethren; take no notice of the defects of others, and form no opinion to their disadvantage."

The chief reason why every one ought to look to himself and to apply himself in good earnest to work out with holy fear his eternal salvation, is because this is entirely a private and individual business, which absolutely requires every one's personal labour and exertion to secure it.

In human affairs it is somewhat excusable if we do not evince great diligence respecting them, because we can execute them through the instrumentality of others, and our negligence in fulfilling them may be supplied by the labour and diligence of others who are concerned in the business. Thus, for instance, a king may govern his kingdom through the instrumentality of his ministers and different officers; and if he happen to be careless about the interests of his subjects, his neglect of the duties of his high charge may be remedied by the wisdom and experience, by the zeal and fidelity of those more faithful subjects who attend around his throne. In the same manner parents may provide for the education of their children by the aid of masters and tutors, and their neglect to instruct their children may be supplied by the care and attention of suitable teachers. So also, if the husband is careless and negligent in the management of domestic affairs, the wife may compensate for his

defect by her diligence and activity; but the case is far otherwise with regard to the attainment of eternal salvation, since this is our own personal affair, our own peculiar business, the success of which depends entirely upon our own individual efforts, so that if we are so foolish and senseless as to neglect it, it is hopeless to expect that any one else can supply the defect; it is in vain to look for a remedy; all is lost for ever. In order to attain eternal salvation it is necessary that we ourselves purify our souls from the stain of sin, that we ourselves subdue our disorderly inclinations, that we ourselves do violence to our corrupt nature, and devote our hearts entirely and unreservedly to the love and service of Almighty God; and in case we should neglect this, is it not useless to hope that others will fulfil it in our place? Represent to yourself that fearful moment in which the transitory scene of this deceitful world shall vanish from your fading eyes, and you shall be challenged to appear before the awful tribunal of an all-just and all-powerful Judge. What will your condition be in that tremendous moment? What will be your lot in that awful hour? Will you be able to escape the dreadful trial by substituting some other person who may appear and stand in your place before the eternal Judge? Will it be in your power to commit your cause and defence to some powerful friend? Ah! no, for it is appointed to each one of us to stand before the judgment-seat of Christ, to render *in person* an account of his stewardship. It is useless to hope that another may appear and relieve us from the heavy charge; for each one must carry his own burden, and answer for himself in that awful hour. The fearful judgment upon which depends our happiness

or misery for endless ages shall be decided between ourselves and Christ alone, and woe to us if at that hour we are found to have deviated from the path of justice, and neglected our last end; legions of infernal spirits will indeed confront us, exposing each hidden crime of our past lives, and calling for our condemnation; but with all their malice they will not be able to injure us in the least if we are found to have fulfilled our sublime destiny, to have spent our lives in the love and service of God. Countless angels, too, will stand around the resplendent throne of the Almighty Judge as spectators of that awful trial; but all their burning love and earnest supplications will be insufficient to appease the anger of the Eternal Judge, or prevent Him from pronouncing against us the sentence of everlasting death, if, unhappily, we are found guilty in His sight.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"Fight the good fight of faith; lay hold on eternal life, whereunto thou art called." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Be vigilant, and delight in God's service, and often think with thyself to what end thou camest to Religion, and why thou didst leave the world: Was it not that thou mightest live to God, and become a spiritual man? Be fervent, therefore, in thy spiritual progress, for thou shalt shortly receive the reward of thy labours; and then grief and fear shall no more come near thee. Thou shalt labour now a little, and thou shalt find great rest, yea, everlasting joy. If thou continue faithful and fervent in working, God will doubtless be faithful and liberal in rewarding. Thou must preserve a good and firm hope of coming to the crown, but must not think thyself secure, lest thou grow negligent and proud."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

THE great St. Bernard, after having entered religion, used to excite himself to fervour in the fulfilment of his duties by asking himself why he had entered religion. "Bernard, Bernard, for what art thou come hither?" St. Arsenius often asked himself the same question, and often entering into himself, demanded an account of his own actions. "Arsenius," said he, "wherefore hast thou left the world? What was thy intention in quitting it and entering into religion? Was it not to apply thyself wholly to please God, and not to be at all solicitous to procure the esteem and good will of men? Be, then, serious and diligent in carrying on the design thou hadst at that time, and value not the opinion men may have of thee. All desire of honour, praise, and vanity is, pro-

(a) 1 Tim. vi. 12.

perly speaking, that world which thou hast renounced. Do not suffer thy heart to be seized anew with these follies; for it will be of no service to keep thy body shut up in a cloister, if thy heart still sighs and longs for the esteem of men, and so hurries thee continually back again to the world." Thus did these great saints encourage and fortify themselves; and so should we in like manner animate and strengthen ourselves against all the difficulties we may meet with in religion. When you find a repugnance to obey a superior in what he orders, encourage yourself by these or the like reflections: *Wherefore art thou entered into religion?* Was it to do thy own will? Was it not rather to submit it to the will of another? Wherefore, then, dost thou pretend to follow thy own? Whenever you find that the effects of poverty molest you, encourage yourself in these terms: "Art thou come hither to seek thy own ease and convenience, and to be free from the least want of anything? Dost thou not remember that thou camest to religion to be poor, and to suffer the want of many things, as one truly poor? Wherefore, then, dost thou complain?" When you imagine that others have not a sufficient regard and esteem for you, console yourself by often saying: "Hast thou entered into religion to be respected, or not rather to be neglected and forgotten by all men, and with the intention to disregard the opinion and esteem of the world? Why dost thou now refuse that which thou camest hither to seek? Wherefore wilt thou run after that which thou hast once quitted? Thou camest not to do thy own will, but to be truly poor, to live in want of conveniences, and to be neglected and scorned by men." This is to be a true religious;

this is to be dead to the world, and to live wholly to God.

Let us, then, often call to mind that it is for this end we entered into religion, and that it will not at all profit us to be in religion unless we perform what we came for. It is not the place, but our lives, that must make us saints. The great St. Austin treats this point exceedingly well in a sermon wherein he addresses himself to those religious who lived in the desert. "Behold," says he, "we have come into solitude, we have come into the desert; yet it is not the place, but our good works that can make us saints; these must sanctify the place and ourselves too. Do not then trust to the holiness of the place; we may sin in all places, and may everywhere meet with damnation; for the angels sinned in Heaven, Adam in Paradise; and you know there was no place could be more holy than these. It is not, then, the place that makes the saints; for if the place could sanctify those who live in it, neither man nor angels could ever have fallen from their dignities." I say the same. Let us not imagine that because we entered religion all the work is done, and that we are already out of danger; for it will avail us nothing to be religious, unless we do those things which become true religious men; for we are not come hither to be men of great learning, nor to become great preachers, but solely and purely to become fervent servants of God, and to labour earnestly after perfection.

St. Vincent of Paul suggests another excellent means for doing well and diligently all our actions, which is that of doing each operation as if it were to be the last of our lives. "Wherefore, in every work," writes this saint, "say to thyself, 'Were

it made known to thee, that after such an action death would immediately ensue, in what way wouldst thou perform it?'"

A certain priest was accustomed to go to confession every morning before saying mass; falling sick, he was advised to confess as if he were at the point of death; he answered, "Blessed be God, I have done so every day for thirty years; so that I have nothing more to say than usual."

St. Bernard, speaking of the manner in which a religious ought to comport himself in all he does, says, "That in all his actions he should often repeat to himself: 'Wert thou to die presently, wouldst thou do this?'" And St. Basil gives us the same counsel when he says, "Have always thy last hour before thy eyes; when thou risest in the morning, doubt whether thou shalt live till night; and when thou goest to bed, do not assure thyself that thou wilt live till next morning; and in this manner it will be very easy for thee to correct thy vices." St. Anthony also gave the same advice to his disciples to encourage them to virtue and perfection; and without doubt there is no better means to help us to do our actions well than to regard each day as our last. If we could put ourselves into this disposition of mind, and perform our actions as if we were to die soon after them, we should certainly perform them in a far different manner, and with far greater perfection than we do. With what fervour, for instance, would a priest say mass if he thought it would be the last action of his life, and that afterwards he should have no more time to merit or to perform the least good work? What attention and zeal should we not have in our prayer if we were persuaded it were to be our last, and that we should

never have any more leisure to ask God pardon for our sins and implore his mercy? "Happy," says Jesus Christ, "is the servant whom his master at his coming shall find busy in performing his duty." Job acted thus, as he himself tells us: "From the time of my combat in this life, I daily attend when my *change* will come; Thou wilt call me, O Lord, and I will answer Thee."

The best exercise for a religious would be, according to St. Francis Borgia, to place himself twenty-four times a day in the situation of a dying man, and often repeat to himself, *I may die this day.*

St. Bonaventure says that God has vouchsafed to leave us in a state of uncertainty as to the time of our death, that we might set no value on temporal things; that seeing how every hour, nay, every moment, we may lose them, we may not in any way be attached to them, but aspire to those inestimable blessings we shall always possess in the heavenly Jerusalem. "Thou fool," says the Son of God to the rich, covetous man, "this night they will require thy soul of thee; and whose shall those things be which thou hast gathered together?"(a)

(a) Luke xii. 20.

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"Be zealous for the better gifts, and I show unto you yet a more excellent way." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Turn all occasions to thy spiritual profit, so that if thou seest or hearest any good examples, thou mayest be spurred on to imitate them. But if thou observe anything that is blameworthy, take care thou commit not the same; or if thou at any time hast done it, labour to amend it out of hand."—*Thomas à Kempis.*

Another excellent means suggested by the saints and other masters of the spiritual life for the diligent performance of our duties and the advancement in perfection, is to consider attentively the lives of the more pious and virtuous, and propose them to ourselves as models for our imitation. The glorious St. Anthony says, that as the bees settle upon and extract from every flower its most pure and exquisite substance to make honey, so a religious ought to observe every man in his community, and learn from one modesty, from another silence, from a third fervour, from a fourth obedience and resignation; in fine, he ought to imitate what is most commendable in each, and endeavour to conform in all things to the proposed model. It was thus St. Anthony himself acted, and by this means became so great a saint. Good example is one of the greatest advantages we have in religion. When St. Jerome advised men to live in community rather than live in solitude, it was, as he said, to the end that they might derive mutual edification from one another.

(a) 1 Cor. xii. 31.

A certain pagan king, being asked what sort of republic he considered the best,—"That," said he, "wherein the citizens live without strife or sedition, and strive with emulation who shall become most virtuous."

When a bow is too feebly bent, the archer is not able to hit the mark unless he aims considerably higher, because the looseness of the string gives to the arrow a downward direction. It is precisely so with us. Our nature is so feeble, and we are so relaxed by the evil habits we have contracted, that we must take our aim considerably higher than the mark if we wish to reach it. Man is become so weak by sin, that to attain an ordinary degree of virtue, his thoughts and desires must soar much higher.

St. Austin, commenting on Christ's commandment whereby we are strictly enjoined to love the Lord our God with our whole heart, with our whole soul, with our whole mind, and with all our strength, writes thus:—"Why are we commanded to love God with all our heart, which is a command we cannot fully perform in this life? It is because a man never runs well if he knows not how far he has to go." Almighty God has set immediately before our eyes the greatest of all the commandments, that aiming at an object so sublime, at perfection so complete, we may constantly endeavour to reach it; and if through weakness we are unable fully to reach it, the higher we aim the nearer shall we approach the object. St. Jerome, explaining these words of the Psalmist, "Blessed is the man, O Lord, whose help is from Thee; his heart is always thinking how to raise itself higher and higher," says: "The just man has his eyes continually raised to the things most sublime in virtue; he

aspires to increase in perfection; and it is this he perpetually thinks on, according to the saying of the Wise Man, 'The thoughts of the strong are always carried to an abundant increase.'" For this reason the masters of the spiritual life earnestly exhort us to read the lives of the saints, and to observe their most distinguished virtues, that we may imitate them; or at least that, considering their great purity, and how far we come short of it, we may feel a holy confusion, and humble ourselves in the sight of God. "He will look upon other men," says holy Job, "and then will say, I have sinned."(a) St. Jerome relates that St. Anthony went to visit St. Paul, the first hermit, and admiring the holiness of his life, at his return, being asked by his disciples where he had been, "Alas," replied the holy man, "miserable sinner that I am! I have no right to bear the name of a religious; I have seen an Elias, I have seen a St. John the Baptist in the desert, when I beheld Paul in his solitude." We read also of the great St. Macarius, that having seen the sublime perfection of some holy hermits whom he had visited, the blessed man wept, saying to his disciples, "I have seen a real and true religious; but as for me, I deserve not the name of a religious." What these great saints said out of pure humility, we may say with a great deal of truth, when we consider the example set by them, and by many others who lived before and since their time.

"Be ye perfect," says our blessed Lord, "as your heavenly Father is perfect." Let us often consider the infinite perfection of our heavenly Father, and then endeavour to show by our actions that we

(a) Job xxxiii. 27.

are true children of such a Father. Let us take example from our brethren also, and especially from our eldest brother, Jesus Christ, who most freely gave His blood and life to repair the losses incurred by our race, and to restore it to its former splendour. But if so great an example dazzles us, let us look upon our other brothers, who were as feeble as ourselves, born in sin as we were, subject to passions, temptations, and evil inclinations, as we are. They fought against them constantly; they conquered, and gained a crown of glory, and our mother the Church proposes their examples to us, and celebrates their feasts, in order to encourage us to imitate them. "Some of them," says St. Paul, "were racked, not accepting deliverance, that they might find a better resurrection. And others had trial of mockeries and stripes, moreover also of bands and prisons: they were stoned, they were cut asunder, they were tempted, they were put to death by the sword, they wandered about in sheep-skins, in goat-skins, being in want, distressed, afflicted; of whom the world was not worthy: wandering in deserts, in mountains, and in dens, and in caves of the earth." (a)

(a) Epist. Hebrews xi. 35-38.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"I am the Almighty God, walk before me and be perfect." (a)—*Almighty God to the Patriarch Abraham.*

"If you wish to find a short and compendious method, which contains in itself all other means, and is most efficacious for overcoming every temptation and difficulty, and for acquiring perfection, it is the exercise of the presence of God."—*St. Basil.*

A PRIEST, who was the intimate friend of this holy doctor, suffered many severe temptations, as well as violent threats, from Julian the Apostate, and yet he remained steadfast. The way he accounted for his constancy is thus declared in his own words: "During the whole time, I do not remember that I ever once lost sight of the presence of God."

When Joseph was tempted to commit sin, "How can I do this," said he, "in the sight of God?" And the chaste Susanna thus answered her tempters: "It is better that I fall into your hands without fault, than that I should sin in the presence of God." St. Ephrem being tempted to commit sin by a wicked woman, said that he was ready, provided they did it openly in the public square of the city; which she refused, being unwilling to undergo such a confusion and shame. "Oh! then," replied the saint, "you fear the sight of men, and are you not afraid to sin in the presence of God and His holy angels?" and with these words he converted her. St. Thäis, when once she felt that in committing sin she was beheld by the all-seeing eye of God, became a true

(a) Gen. xvii. 1.

penitent, conquered all temptations, and attained to a great degree of sanctity. Seneca says, that if we wish to be virtuous and do all things well, we ought to imagine ourselves in the presence of some person of great merit and quality, and accustom ourselves to say and do all things as we should do or say were we actually in his presence. And if this may be sufficient to induce us to perform our duty exactly, of what efficacy will it not be to place ourselves always in God's presence, and to think every moment that He sees us, especially since this is not a mere imagination, but a real truth? "The eyes of our Lord," says the Holy Ghost, "are more glorious than the sun, looking round about upon all the ways of men, and upon the bottom of the abyss; and penetrating the most secret corners of man's heart."(a) St. Francis of Sales insists, in a particular manner, on the importance of keeping our mind fixed on the presence of God, in order to perform well our actions. "Imitate little children," says he, in "The Introduction to a Devout Life," "who, while they hold their father fast by one hand, gather strawberries and blackberries with the other. In like manner hold fast the hand of your heavenly Father with one hand, while with the other you collect the goods of this world. Look up to Him, from time to time, to see if your actions and employments are pleasing to Him. Above all things, quit not His hand, withdraw not yourself from His protection with the hope of greater gain; for, should you forsake Him, you will not be able to take one step without falling to the ground. When engaged with ordinary affairs and occupations, which do

(a) Eccl. xxiii. 28.

not require particular attention, think more of God than of what you are doing; like mariners who, in order to arrive at the port to which they are bound, look up more towards heaven than upon the sea on which they sail. And when taken up with affairs of such importance as to require your whole attention, fail not, at least from time to time, to look up to God, and He will work with you, in you, and for you; and your labour will at all times bring you consolation."

Thus acted the venerable Father Da Ponte, who, in all his actions, never lost sight of his loving Saviour. Often during the day he was seen to raise his eyes and hands to heaven, as if delighting in God. At other times he gave demonstrations of surprise, as if experiencing some unusual favour; then again, he would break out in tender ejaculations, indicating the love which burned in his heart. Sometimes he recited passages from holy scripture, expressive of the infinite bounty and wisdom of God; thus giving to understand that He was the sole object of his love. Above all, whatever he saw or heard, he turned it to some spiritual profit. When recounting the things he continually begged of God in his prayers and contemplations, he reduced them to these general heads: 1st. A great light whereby to know God himself, and those who were under his care and direction. 2ndly. An ardent, disinterested love of God, caring for nothing else in the world. 3rdly. A great hatred of himself, with a great love for crosses, contempt, and sufferings. 4thly. An ardent zeal for the divine glory and the salvation of souls. We also read of the blessed Paul of the Cross, that however distracting might be the affairs which engaged his attention, he knew how

to keep God always before his mind, and it was his delight to return as speedily as possible into his interior cell, and to resume his sweet communications with his heavenly master. Everything served to remind him of God, and he used to imagine that all creatures combined to excite the love of Him who made them. He was often observed, when walking in the fields, especially during the spring season, to gaze earnestly at the flowers as he went along, and to touch them with his stick, saying, "Be silent, be silent," and he used to tell his religious that the flowers were always calling upon him to lift up his heart in love and adoration towards their heavenly Creator.

Some ancient religious came one day to the cell of the holy Abbot Stephen to be edified by his conversation; but he, keeping silence while they conversed on different subjects of piety, "Father," said they, "we came to you in hope of learning something, why don't you say something to us?" "I beg your pardon," said he, "I really did not take notice what you were speaking of, for, to tell you the truth, I have nothing before my eyes, night or day, but our Lord Jesus Christ crucified." With this answer they departed, not a little edified.

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"To him that overcometh I will give to eat of the tree of life, which is in the paradise of my God." (a) "To him that overcometh I will give to sit with me in my throne; as I also have overcome and am set down with my Father in His throne." (b) —*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"If it were given a man to see virtue's reward in the next world, he would occupy his intellect, memory, and will in nothing but good works, careless of danger and fatigue."—*St. Catharine of Genoa.*

THE blessed Boniface, a monk of the Cistercian order, desiring to see the infant Jesus on Christmas night, the virgin Mother appeared to him, with her divine child. The veil being removed from His countenance, the holy man was so delighted therewith as to account all the tribulations of earth as nothing to get a sight of Christ in Paradise. Holy Francis, also, contentedly suffering, proclaimed "every pain he endured a pleasure in sight of the reward without measure and without end which awaits the just in the life to come."

A certain servant of God appeared after her death, and said that so great were the glory and happiness wherewith she was rewarded by God, on account of her good works, that she would willingly endure all the world's tribulations, until the day of judgment, if the merit of a well-recited "Ave Maria" could be attained thereby.

The brethren having desired one of the ancient fathers to remit something of his great labours and

(a) Apoc. ii. 7. (b) Ibid. iii. 21.

austerities, he answered: "Believe me, my dear children, I am of opinion that Abraham himself, when he saw the greatness of the eternal rewards of heaven, was sorry he had not laboured more than he did whilst he remained here upon earth."

As a certain hermit, who dwelt in a cell near the wilderness, at the distance of several miles from any water, was one day going for water, he found himself so much exhausted and tired with the journey, that he began to blame himself for taking such unnecessary pains, and to think of changing his abode and building himself a cell near the spring. Whilst he had this thought on his mind, he heard one behind him numbering his steps; and turning about, he saw an angel, who told him he was commissioned from heaven to take an exact account of his laborious steps, which should all be hereafter rewarded. This vision encouraged the good man, and made him not only give up his design of fixing his habitation near the water, but also determined him to remove his cell to a still greater distance, since the divine goodness was pleased to reward all his steps in so bountiful a manner.

Let us, in imitation of the saints, often raise our mind to the contemplation of the throne of glory which our Blessed Lord has prepared for His faithful followers, and this consideration will greatly assist us to walk in holiness and justice all the days of our life, by fulfilling faithfully and diligently the duties of our vocation. Let us imitate the saints, who, full of the thought of the future reward, looked with the greatest contempt upon all earthly things, and placed their greatest delight and glory in the love and service of God. "What have I in heaven," says holy David, "and besides Thee, what do I desire upon earth? the

God of my heart, and my portion for ever."(a) "I count all things as dirt," cries out St. Paul, "that I may gain Jesus Christ."(b) And the seraphic St. Francis continually exclaimed, "My God and my all, my God and my all." "Let the learned," says St. Paulinus, "enjoy their learning, let the rich possess their riches, and kings their kingdoms; but for my part, Jesus Christ is my wisdom, my riches, my kingdom, my all." Like these fervent lovers of God, let us join, even whilst upon earth, the angelic choirs in adoring the infinite majesty of God; like them, let us devote ourselves entirely and unreservedly to His love. When alarmed or discouraged by the length and difficulties of the way, let us animate our drooping courage by the consideration of that crown of glory which awaits us above; that happiness prepared for us in heaven, our true country, compared with which all the sufferings and afflictions of this life, as St. Paul says, are as nothing. When a mariner is in danger of shipwreck, and of being given up to the mercy of the raging waves, does he not use his utmost endeavours to gain the nearest port, to reach some place of safety? Does he spare any efforts to escape from his perilous situation to save himself from a watery grave? Does he lose courage at the thought of the hard labour he must endure, and the efforts he must make to save his life? Oh, no! life is dear to him; he struggles, he labours with all his strength, he exerts all his powers to free himself from danger; he pauses not, he rests not till he has overcome the violence of the foaming billows, until he finds himself in a place of safety. Behold, we are

(a) Ps. lxxii. 26. (b) Phil. iii. 8.

now cast upon the raging ocean of this mortal life, in continual danger of perishing amidst the waves of temptation that foam around us, and bear us on towards the gulf of endless perdition. Who, then, will be so blind and so cruel towards his own soul as not to exert himself to the utmost of his power to gain the victory, and reach the port of salvation! Prostrate in spirit before the throne of God, let us cry out with the four-and-twenty ancients of the Apocalypse, "Thou art worthy, O Lord our God, to receive glory, and honour, and benediction, for ever and ever, Amen."(a)

THIRTIETH DAY.

"The path of the just as a shining light goeth forwards, and increaseth even to perfect day." (b)—*The Wise Man.*
"He that is just let him be justified still; and he that is holy let him be sanctified still." (c)—*The Apostle St. John.*

It is generally remarked by the saints, that the man who really desires to walk faithfully in the way of holiness, by the diligent performance of all the duties of his station, must never relax in his labour and care for his spiritual advancement; but forgetting, as it were, the past, must strive to advance more and more every day from virtue to virtue. "Those who lead a spiritual life," says St. Gregory, "are like a man in the midst of a

(a) Apoc. v. 12. (b) Prov. iv. 18.
(c) Apoc. xxii. 11.

rapid river, if he stops but for a moment, and strives not continually to bear up against the stream, he will run great risk of being carried down. Now the course we ought to take is so directly opposite to the current of our nature corrupted by sin, that unless we labour and force ourselves to go on, we shall certainly be hurried back by the impetuous torrent of our passions." The holy doctor, in another place, says that the more the true servants of God advance and approach to their end, which is perfection, the more they increase in fervour and diligence in serving God. "Men who are digging for a great treasure," says he, "dig more earnestly and diligently as they get deeper; for hoping they are not far from what they looked for, they imagine that a little more pains will bring them to it; and by these hopes they encourage themselves to work with new energy. In like manner, those who truly take to heart the great affair of their salvation press on the more eagerly the farther they are advanced in the way of perfection and the nearer they approach it. There is but a little earth which hides your treasure from you, dig a little further and you will discover it; take courage, make haste;" and labour as much the harder as you see the day approach nearer, as the Apostle counsels the Hebrews; the nearer we draw towards our end, the harder we ought to labour.

St. Laurence Justinian teaches the same thing: "When a man is on the road of salvation," says he, "he perceives in himself a continual desire to advance; and the nearer he approaches to perfection so much the greater is his anxiety to attain it; because the brighter the light grows the more he seems to himself to be devoid of all virtue

and negligent in good actions; if he thinks he has any virtue, or performs any good action, it always appears full of imperfection, and he makes but little account of it. Thus it is that he continually labours for perfection. St. Bonaventure says, that "the more a man ascends a hill, the more extensive will be his prospect; in like manner, the nearer we come to the top of the mountain of perfection, the greater we perceive the extent of virtue to be." When we contemplate a high mountain at a distance, we imagine that it reaches so near the heavens, that were we upon the top we fancy we might be able to touch the clouds with our hand; but having travelled on, and got up to the very top, we find that we are still far from the heavens; just so it happens with those who travel in the way of perfection, and advance constantly in the knowledge and love of God. St. Cyprian, explaining the words of the Psalmist, "Man shall arrive at the greatest height of which his heart is capable, and God will still be more and more exalted," says, "The higher our souls are by degree raised to the knowledge of God, the higher he appears still exalted above us. Whatever knowledge of God we may have attained, and how great soever our love is of Him, there remains still infinite degrees of knowledge and love of Him beyond what we have already acquired."

St. Fulgentius was so inflamed with the desire of perfection, that whatsoever he did, it always seemed to him but little, and he constantly aimed at something higher. St. Vincent of Paul every day accused himself more and more of being imperfect, and on that account employed all his mind in studying continually how to mend himself and advance in virtue. St. Ignatius constantly com-

pared one day with another, and the advancement made in one with that made in another; and thus was always filled with an earnest desire to advance, in order to arrive at the height of perfection to which God called him.

This constant aim and labour after perfection, without ever relaxing in the holy undertaking, is especially required in religious, who, by embracing the religious state, have engaged themselves in a particuar manner to the pursuit of perfection. The angelic doctor, St. Thomas, declares this expressly in the following words: "A religious life," says he, "is a state of perfection: not that a man becomes perfect as soon as he becomes a religious, but because religious have a more strict obligation of aspiring to perfection; and because he who strives not to become perfect, and who does not apply himself in good earnest to it, cannot be said to be a true religious, as he does not do the only thing for which he should have embraced that profession."

THIRTY-FIRST DAY.

"My meat is to do the will of Him that sent me, that I may perfect His work." (a)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"Whatever we do derives its value from a conformity to the divine will; so that even refreshment or diversion, if enjoyed for this end, is more meritorious than to endure martyrdom without this intention. Fix this principle well in your mind, keep it in view at all times, like the mechanic who does no work without his rule. Our greatest evil is, that we wish to serve God after our own fashion, and not after His; according to our own will, and not according to His. When He wishes that we should be afflicted with illness, we wish to be well; when He wishes that we should serve him in sufferings, we desire to serve Him with active works; when He is anxious for us to exercise the virtue of charity, we wish to exercise that of humility; when He desires resignation from us, we seek for a sensible devotion, for fervour in prayer, or for some other virtue; and this not because the things which we desire are more grateful to Him, but because they are more suitable to our own inclinations. This is certainly the greatest hinderance which we can set in the way to perfection; it being unquestionable that, if we wish to be saints according to our own will, we shall never become so at all: in order to become a saint indeed, it is necessary to do all in conformity with the will of God."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

St. John the Baptist was, doubtless, fervent in the love of our Redeemer, for he was replenished with His grace even in his mother's womb; yet he remained for four-and-twenty years in the desert without once seeing Him; and after he had baptized Him, and had been a witness to the opening of the heavens upon Him, he returned to the desert, and never came again into His presence during the remainder of his life. But what motive could induce so ardent a lover of Jesus to renounce the

(a) John iv. 34.

enjoyment of His company? It was that he might perform the will of God, who had destined him to be the voice crying in the wilderness.

On one occasion, conversing with a confidential friend, St. Mary Magdalene of Pazzi said: "I wish for no other good but that which comes to me by the way of the divine will; and I would rather choose to have no gift, except always to abandon my own will and my own desires to God, rather than to receive any gift according to my own will or desire. Yes, yes, 'In me sint, Deus vota tua et non vota mea.'" And this was the grace which she demanded with the greatest fervour and frequency from our Lord, that He would make her always, even to death, obedient and entirely subject to His will and pleasure.

This saint took the greatest care that the novices entrusted to her charge should accustom themselves to look principally to the fulfilment of God's will in all their actions. To impress this maxim more forcibly on their minds, she would suddenly ask them for what end they were engaged in anything on which they happened to be employed, and if they answered that they had no supernatural intention, she added: "Do you not see you lose all merit by actions in which God has no part?"

SEPTEMBER.

CONFIDENCE AND PEACE.

"My people shall sit in the beauty of peace and in the tabernacles of confidence."—Is. xxxii. 18.

FIRST DAY.

"Blessed be the man that trusteth in the Lord, and whose hope the Lord is. He shall be as a tree that is planted by the waters, that spreadeth out its roots towards moisture: and it shall not fear when the heat cometh. And the leaf thereof shall be green, and in the time of drought it shall not be solicitous, neither shall it cease at any time to bring forth fruit." (a)—*The Prophet Jeremias.*

"O taste and see that the Lord is sweet. Blessed is the man that hopeth in the Lord." (b)—*Holy David.*

CONFIDENCE in God is a duty sweet to all Christians, and a sure means of drawing down upon us the choicest blessings. "The Lord is good," exclaims the prophet Jeremias, "to them that hope in Him." (c)

"God," says holy David, "is the protector of all that trust in Him." (d) "Mercy shall encompass him that hopeth in the Lord." (e) "The house of Israel hath hoped in the Lord, He is their

(a) Jer. xvii. 7, 8. (c) Lament. iii. 25.
(b) Ps. xxxiii. 9. (d) Ps. xvii. 31.
(e) Ibid. xxxi. 10.

helper and protector; the house of Aaron hath hoped in the Lord, He is their helper and their protector. They that fear the Lord have hoped in the Lord; He is their helper and their protector."(a)

"You that fear the Lord," says Ecclesiasticus, "hope in Him, and mercy shall come to you for your delight."(b)

"Woe to the faint-hearted, who believe not God, and therefore shall not be protected by Him."(c)

The substantial ground for our unlimited confidence in God is, His infinite power, wisdom, and goodness. "To an omnipotent Deity," says Father Scupoli, "nothing is impossible. To an infinite wisdom no enterprise is difficult. To a boundless goodness there is no limit. Applying these qualities to God's love for us, what more is requisite to strengthen our entire trust in Him."

This furnished the key which dictated Father Da Ponte's response to a virtuous lady who could not accommodate herself to the sharp capricious temper of her husband. The good lady thus once addressed the servant of God: "Father, if our Lord would only do me the favour to relieve me from the cross imposed on me by my husband, it seems to me that I should very much advance in His holy love." The holy man, assuming an unusual severity of countenance, said, "My lady, do you believe in God?" Astonished at such a question, the lady, bowing her head, answered with great humility, "I do believe in Him, I do believe in Him; it is my glory to be a daughter of the Catholic church." Upon which the Father thus continued: "Do you believe that God is omnipotence, wisdom, and goodness itself?" "Yes, I

(a) Ps. cxiii. 9, 10, 11. (b) Eccl. ii. 9. (c) Ibid. ii. 15.

do believe all this." "Believe, then, that God, as Goodness itself, loves you tenderly, and desires your welfare; as Wisdom itself, He has given you this husband, by whose means He designs to refine your virtue; and as Omnipotence itself, He will not fail to help you, that your husband may prove no obstacle to your perfection." By these words the lady was effectually instructed and consoled. As this holy man, recommended confidence to others, so he practised it with great perfection himself. He treated with God like a son under the smile of an affectionate father, without any thought of himself; and certain that he was in safe hands, and that a special Providence watched over him and all his affairs, he willingly consigned himself, his life, his health, his honour, his sustenance, his employments, and every concern, corporal or spiritual, great or small, to God, being accustomed to say that he could not doubt that the goodness of God would ordain all things for the good of his soul. His own words will best explain the sublimity of his sentiments on this subject. He says: "In a particular manner I most assuredly trust, that in all my tribulations, labours, perplexities, sorrows and dangers, from whomsoever they may come, I have only to cry out to God, and He will hear me, and either give me what I ask or something better, and that He will give it me immediately, or when He sees it will be most suitable to me. This confidence is chiefly founded on the infinite mercy and liberality of God, and in the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, because I cannot ask either as a son, or as a friend, or as a faithful servant, but only as a poor slave; still, this poor slave importunes One who is rich in mercy, and who wishes to be entreated, that He may have the

pleasure of bestowing His gifts." Although he deemed himself unworthy of every blessing, yet such was his confidence in God, that he never felt a doubt on the subject of his salvation, and hence his greatest delight was to speak of the eternal glory of the saints and of Paradise; of this he always spoke like a pilgrim at a distance from his own country, who enjoys calling it to mind, and willingly speaks to others of its grandeur and beauties. He endeavoured to instil the same confidence into all those under his care. When he met with any timid or pusillanimous souls who were terrified at the sight of their past sins, or who dreaded the difficulties they had to encounter in the service of God, he would say to them, "What are you afraid of? Is it that your sins are many and great? The divine mercy is infinitely greater! Has not Jesus Christ shed all His blood for you? Has he not promised pardon to whomsoever asks it with humility of heart? You must confide in Him. Why are you alarmed? Have you to fight single-handed against hell? Is not God with you? And if God be with us, who shall stand against us? Come, come, generous souls, and advance to the combat. Oh! did you but know what a precious thing it is to suffer willingly for Jesus! He goes before you carrying the cross; and do not doubt but He will sweeten all the bitterness of your sufferings." By such holy words as these he encouraged and animated them to run on in the ways of the Lord, and to labour and suffer willingly anything and everything in the cause of His glory. He used to say, "If God is omnipotent, and out of love unites Himself, with his omnipotence, to any man, such a man becomes omnipotent by participation in His power. His

prayer is omnipotent to obtain whatever he asks of God; his obedience is omnipotent to execute whatever God commands; his patience is omnipotent to suffer whatever trials God sends; and so also is his charity, his zeal, his fortitude, and every other virtue, so that he may say with the apostle, 'I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me.'"

The holy patriarch Abraham, who, as the Apostle St. Paul says, "against hope believed in hope,"(a) exhibits to us a most bright and striking example of perfect confidence in God. God had promised to multiply his posterity like the stars of heaven and the sand of the sea; yet upon receiving the command to sacrifice his only son to God, Abraham did not lose hope; he believed that whilst he obeyed the commandment, God would not fail in His word. Great, assuredly, was his trust; for he saw nothing on which to rest but the word of God. But how true and solid a foundation was that for hope, for it was an infallible word.

Abraham went his way to accomplish the commandment of God with a simplicity beyond comparison; for he took no more thought and made no more reply than he did when God told him to depart out of his country and from amongst his kindred, but at once readily obeyed; and after journeying three days and three nights with his son, without precisely knowing whither he went, upon being asked by his son, who carried the wood of the sacrifice, where was the victim for the holocaust, faithful Abraham replied: "God will provide Himself a victim for a holocaust, my son."(b)

"O my God!" exclaims St. Francis of Sales,

(a) 1 Rom. iv. 8. (b) Gen. xxii. 8.

"how happy should we be, if we could accustom ourselves to make this answer to our hearts when we are in anxiety; if we said, 'Our Lord will provide for it,' and thenceforward took no more care or trouble than Abraham or Isaac did; for Isaac held his peace, believing that the Lord would provide, as his father had told him."

Great, assuredly, is the confidence which God requires us to have in His fatherly care and in His divine providence; but wherefore should we not have it, seeing that it can deceive no one, and that no one ever puts his trust in God who does not reap the fruits of his confidence?

SECOND DAY.

"As a father hath compassion on his children, so hath the Lord compassion on them that fear Him: for He knoweth our frame. He remembereth that we are dust."—*Holy David.*

"God obliges us to call Him by the endearing name of Father; we are therefore to show Him a tender and filial confidence, and we cannot depend too much on His goodness, so long as we do not force Him, by our sins, to have recourse to His justice. When the Almighty is obliged to punish us, we may be assured that He proceeds to such a measure with reluctance, as His nature is goodness, and severity is only shown when we force Him to it by our crimes."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

It is of faith that God is our most kind and loving Father, and that by grace we really and truly are His children. "Behold," exclaims the beloved disciple, "what manner of charity the Father hath

bestowed upon us, that we should be called, and should be in reality the sons of God."(a)

This consideration ought to fill our hearts with the tenderest filial affection and confidence in God in all the events of our life. A dear son, who sees his loving father invested with great titles, abounding in wealth, and endowed with kingly power, feels an assurance in the help and assistance of his father. With how much greater reason, then, ought we to have this assurance when we consider that we have Him for our Father who is absolute Lord of heaven and earth, and that nothing can happen to us without His order and permission? With how much more reason ought we to have full confidence in the special providence of Him Who, by a thousand degrees, is more our father than any carnal parent, who, in comparison of Him, deserves not the name of father? No tenderness or affection can approach or equal that which God bears us. It infinitely exceeds all that nature imprints in the hearts of fathers. We may, therefore, rest satisfied that whatever He ordains, he ordains it for our greater good. His infinite charity will never permit Him to neglect the good of those for whose sake He gave up His only Son to the sufferings and ignominy of the cross. "He who has not spared His own Son, but has delivered Him over for us all; has He not also with Him given us all things?"(b) And He who has so freely given us what He had most precious and dear, will He not also give us whatever else we stand in need of?

Although all Christians are entitled to an unlimited confidence in God their Father, yet such

(a) 1 John iii. 1. (b) Rom. viii. 32.

confidence is the special right of religious, who have left their earthly parents in order to serve God more perfectly in the practice of divine love. What affection, what paternal tenderness may they not assure themselves God bears them? And what care ought they not to believe He will take of them? They might well say with the prophet David: "My father and mother have forsaken me; but the Lord hath received me."(a) What a happy exchange have they made in leaving their earthly friends and taking God for their only inheritance. They may with peculiar reason and confidence exclaim, "The Lord rules me, and I shall want nothing."(b) "It is true I am poor and destitute of all things; but our Lord is solicitous and careful of me."(c) Who is there that may not comfort himself, and who is there that feels not in his heart an extraordinary expansion of tenderness, when he reflects that God himself has care of him, that God protects him with as much goodness and vigilance as if in the whole extent of His eternal providence He had not any other creature to preserve? What motives should we not find for loving God, and giving up ourselves without reserve to Him, if we only considered, as we ought, His paternal providence, and the tender affection He has for us?

There is no maxim which our Saviour has more strongly recommended to us than that of looking up to God as to our most merciful and loving Father, and of placing an unlimited confidence in His mercy and goodness. In the discourse which He made to His disciples in order to strengthen them against the various trials to which they

(a) Ps. xxvi. 10. (b) Ibid. xxii. 1.
(c) Ibid. xxxix. 18.

would be exposed, our blessed Lord exclaims: "I say to you, my friends, be not afraid of them who kill the body, and after that have no more they can do; but I will show you whom you must fear; fear ye Him who, after He hath killed, hath power to cast you into hell. Yea, I say unto you, fear Him. Are not five sparrows sold for two farthings, and not one of them is forgotten before God? Yea, the very hairs of your head are all numbered. Fear not, therefore; you are of more value than many sparrows. Therefore I say unto you, be not solicitous for your life what you shall eat, nor for your body what you shall put on. The life is more than meat, and the body is more than raiment. Consider the ravens, for they sow not, neither do they reap, neither have they storehouse nor barn, and God feedeth them. How much more valuable are you than they? And which of you, by taking thought, can add to his stature one cubit? If, then, ye be not able to do so much as the least thing, why are you solicitous for the rest? Consider the lilies how they grow; they labour not, neither do they spin. But I say to you, not even Solomon, in all his glory, was clothed like one of these. Now, if God clothe in this manner the grass that is to-day in the field, and to-morrow is cast into the oven, how much more you, O ye of little faith? And seek not what you shall eat, nor what you shall drink, and be not lifted up on high. For all these things do the nations of the world seek. But your Father knoweth that you have need of these things. But seek ye first the kingdom of God and His justice, and all these things shall be added unto you. Fear not, little flock, for it hath pleased your Father to give to you a kingdom. Sell what you possess, and give

alms. Make to yourselves bags which grow not old, a treasure in heaven which faileth not; where no thief approacheth, nor moth corrupteth. For where your treasure is, there will your heart be also."(a)

How complete is this instruction of our Divine Master upon the manner in which His true disciple ought to abandon himself into the merciful hands of Divine Providence.

St. Francis of Sales used to say that a true believer must hope well from every occurrence which an allwise Providence permits to happen. In a vision to St. Gertrude the Lord once said: "A man's unwavering trust in me, and his faith in my desire to aid him on all occasions, act so violently and agreeably upon my loving heart, that I cannot withhold my favours from such a confiding soul."

The venerable Berkmans thus expresses his feeling of confidence in the heavenly Father. "Oh, how sweet it is to rely on God! I have, then, nothing to fear. He is my Father, and my Father is all-powerful; I need not fear either that He is unwilling or unable to support the child who throws himself into His bosom. Oh, Jesus, my love! God of my heart, and centre of all my affections, all my happiness, all my good, both for time and eternity, I rest in Thee alone! I expect no graces, no virtues, but inasmuch as I shall be united to Thee. Thou art the true vine, I am only an unprofitable branch, having no other life than what Thou givest me by Thy grace. If I remain inseparably united to Thee I shall share Thy fruitfulness; and sterile as I am of myself, I

(a) Luke xii.

shall bear immortal fruit; but if, unhappily, I separate from Thee, I shall become dry, withered, useless, and only fit to be thrown into the fire. The world, the flesh, and the devil contend with Jesus Christ for the dominion of my heart. Miserable, indeed, shall I be if they succeed! I should be deservedly punished for my evil choice, by the cruel slavery to which these harsh masters would reduce me. On the contrary, O my Saviour, how sweet is it to live under Thy laws! To serve Thee is delightful, and far preferable to the most unrestricted liberty. In Thee I find everything that can comfort and reassure me in the grand voyage to eternity. Thou art the way I must follow, the light which must guide me, and the true life to which I look as the term of my pilgrimage."

THIRD DAY.

"Can a woman forget her infant, so as not to have pity on the son of her womb? And if she should forget, yet will not I forget thee. Behold I have graven thee in my hands: thy walls are always before my eyes." [a]—*God by the Prophet Isaias.*

"It is not easy to declare with what charity God always seeks to forward the salvation of our souls. No mother ever loved her child more tenderly than God loves the favoured children of men."—*Venerable Blosius.*

THIS holy man recommends most particularly a filial confidence in God to all those who wish to advance in holiness. "As God cannot be loved too much," says he, "so, provided thou dost not neglect to do what is in thy power, with an upright

[a] Is. xlix. 15, 16.

intention, thou mayest confide in His protection without measure and without end. The more humble and unlimited is this reliance, the more pleasing and efficacious it will prove with the Almighty. A filial reliance on God does violence, as it were, to the Deity, whose goodness and charity are such that it is hardly possible He should forsake those who sincerely trust in His paternal providence. Day and night thy heavenly Father watcheth over thy safety with unspeakable fondness, and is as solicitous about thy welfare as if thou wert alone in creation. It would be difficult to enumerate even a small portion of His favours to thee, so countless have been the benefits of His love. Blessed are they who trust in an all-wise Providence, and from His paternal hand humbly and thankfully receive any event, whether prosperous or adverse, as the best that could be devised for them, who, with unflinching constancy, continually confide in the wisdom and benevolence of the Most High."

St. Liguori, commenting on these words of Isaias, "I have graven thee in my hands," makes our Lord speak thus to the Christian soul: "My beloved soul, of whom art thou afraid? Why art thou diffident? I hold thee written in my hands, that I may never forget to bestow my benefits upon thee. Art thou afraid of thy enemies? Know that the care of thy defence is always before me, so that I cannot lose sight of it." Then he continues: "For this reason did holy David rejoice, saying: 'O Lord, Thou hast crowned us as with a shield of Thy good will.' (a) Who, O God, will be able to hurt us if thou defendest us with thy bounty and love, and surroundest us on all sides with them?"

(a) Ps. v. 13.

"Hearken," says the Lord, through the prophet Isaias, "children of Israel, who are carried by my bowels, are brought up by my womb."(a) God would make us understand that as a mother's womb serves for a place of habitation, of nourishment, and of whatever else the infant needs, so the bowels of divine mercy and goodness are all things to us, and supply us in all our necessities. Hence, in all their crosses, the just feel so sure of God's assistance, that no distress or affliction which can possibly happen them in this life is able to discompose or molest them. "He who puts his confidence in our Lord," says Jeremias, "is as a tree planted by the river side. In the time of drought he shall not be solicitous."(b) That is to say, nothing shall touch his heart, he shall not be dejected by all the misfortunes of this life, because he is certain nothing can happen but by the will and appointment of his Father, in whose tenderness and affection he so much confides.

"He has hidden me in His tabernacle," says holy David; "in the day of evils He has protected me in the retreat of His tabernacle."(c) He does more yet. He hides us under His wings. And as though this were not enough, He hides us in the very apples of His eyes. This accords well with the prayer of the same prophet, who begs God, "to protect him as the apple of His eye."(d) And with what our Lord himself says, through the prophet Zachary: "He who touches you touches the apple of my eye."(e)

We read in the life of St. Gertrude, that neither

(a) Is. xlvi. 3.
(b) Jer. xvii. 8.
(c) Ps. xxvi. 5.
(d) Ibid. xvi. 8.
(e) Zach. ii. 8.

dangers nor crosses, neither loss of her goods, nor even her own sins, were ever able to diminish the firm confidence she had in the mercy of God. Insomuch that she was strongly persuaded, whatever fell out, whether it were agreeable or contrary to her desire, was equally designed for her greater good by the disposition of Providence.

Almighty God once said to St. Mecthildes: "I am very well pleased that men rely upon and trust in my mercy; whoever has an humble and firm confidence in me will enjoy my favour in this life, and be amply rewarded in the next. The more men confide in me, the more graces shall they receive from me; for it is impossible they should not obtain of me all they hope for by relying on the fidelity of my promises. Wherefore it is very expedient for those who expect great things from me to confide entirely in me." At another time this saint asked God what she ought chiefly to believe, and what she should expect from His unspeakable goodness. "Believe," said He to her, "that after your death, I will receive you as a father receives his dearest child, and that there never was any father yet who has so liberally imparted his goods to his only son as I will impart to you the inexhaustible treasures of my grace in bestowing myself upon you. Whosoever has this confidence in my infinite goodness, and resigns himself into my hands with the spirit of charity and humility, shall be eternally happy."

The venerable Father Scupoli suggests the following means for the attainment of a perfect confidence in God:—"The first is to ask it with great humility. The second is to contemplate, with a lively faith, the immense power and infinite wisdom of that Supreme Being to whom nothing is

difficult, whose goodness knows no limits, whose love for those who serve Him is ever ready to furnish them with whatever is requisite for their spiritual welfare and for gaining a complete victory over themselves. The third is, frequently to call to mind the thousand different places of holy scriptures which assure us that no one who puts his trust in God shall ever be confounded. The fourth means of acquiring both a diffidence in ourselves and a confidence in God is, that when we have any good action to perform, or some failing to overcome, we cast our eyes upon our own weakness on one side, and on the other contemplate the infinite power, wisdom, and goodness of God, before entering upon the task; and thus balancing what we fear from ourselves with what we hope from God, we may courageously undergo the greatest difficulties and severest trials. With these arms, joined with prayer, we shall be able to execute the greatest designs, and gain complete victories.

"But if we neglect this method, though we may flatter ourselves we are actuated by a principle of confidence in God, we shall generally be deceived; because presumption is so very natural to man, that it even insinuates itself imperceptibly into the confidence he imagines he has in God, and the diffidence he fancies he has of himself. Consequently, in order to banish entirely all presumption, and to sanctify every action, the consideration of our own weakness must necessarily precede that of the divine power, and both of them be previous to all our undertakings."

O God, my helper and my protector, why dost Thou love me so much as to wish that I should place all my hopes and affections in Thee?

Hast Thou forgotten the injuries which I have committed against Thee? But since Thou hast dealt with me with such great love, that instead of consigning me to hell, Thou hast bestowed upon me many graces, I will henceforward love Thee alone who art my only good, my all! My most amiable God, if hitherto I have offended Thee, what most afflicts me now is not so much the punishment which I have deserved, as the displeasure which I have occasioned Thee, who art worthy of infinite love! But Thou knowest not how to despise a heart that repents and humbles itself. 'A contrite and humble heart, O God, Thou wilt not despise.' (a) I desire in this life, and for the next, no other good but Thee! 'For what have I in heaven? and besides Thee what do I desire upon earth? Thou art the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever.' (b) Thou alone art and shall be for ever the Lord of my heart and of my will; Thou alone my good, my happiness, my hope, my love, my all; the God of my heart, and the God that is my portion for ever.

(a) Ps. l. 19. (b) Ibid. lxxii. 25, 26.

FOURTH DAY.

"God so loved the world as to give His only begotten Son; that whosoever believeth in Him may not perish, but may have life everlasting. For God sent not His Son into the world to judge the world, but that the world may be saved by Him." (a)—*The Evangelist St. John.*

"I am come that my sheep may have life, and may have it abundantly. I am the good shepherd: the good shepherd gives his life for his sheep." (b)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

Of all the names which claim our respect and veneration, there is none so calculated to raise our confidence as that of Jesus. This name does not call to our mind any of those heroes of old whom God sent to reproach the people for their crimes, to rescue them from a temporal slavery, and to guide them to the promised land; but it reminds us of the Son of the living God, the immortal King of Ages,—of Him who, being in all things equal to the Father, yet, to deliver us from the slavery of sin, and to fill us with heavenly blessings, emptied Himself, taking the form of a servant, and became obedient unto death, even to the death of the cross; for which cause God has also exalted Him, and given Him a name which is above all names, that "in the name of Jesus every knee should bow, of those that are in heaven, on earth, and under the earth." "There is no other name," says St. Peter, "given to men, whereby they can be saved, but that of Jesus." We are not redeemed with corruptible things, as gold and silver, from the slavery of the princes of darkness, but with the

(a) John iii. 16, 17. (b) Ibid. x. 10, 11.

precious blood of Jesus Christ, as of a lamb unspotted and undefiled. He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, pursuers of good works. He blotted out the handwriting of the decree that stood against us, and has taken the same out of the way, fastening it to the cross. By Him, and through Him, we have been called from darkness to a wonderful light; from the state of children of wrath to that of children of love. He is the beloved Son of God, in whom our heavenly Father is well pleased; the head of all principalities and powers, the king of glory, the image of God, the figure of his substance. In Him dwelleth corporally all the fulness of the Godhead, and in Him are hidden all the treasures of the wisdom and knowledge of God; to Him all power has been given in heaven and on earth. He is the expected of all nations, the teacher and legislator of all people, the model of all the elect, the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He is our mediator and our advocate before the throne of God, whence He poureth down upon us the most pure and saving streams of His grace. He is our greatest Benefactor, our most loving Parent, our most affectionate Saviour. He is the source, in a word, of all our good; for he that spared not even His own Son, but delivered him up for us all, how hath He not also with Him given us all things?

The principal considerations calculated to inspire us with confidence in Jesus may be comprehended under the two following heads:—1st. That He is the Lord of majesty and glory, the essential object of the complacency of His eternal Father, Who directs all the works of His infinite power and wisdom to the exaltation of this His most

adorable and beloved Son. 2nd. That He is the source of all grace and salvation for mankind. As regards the first point, it is most certain that Jesus Christ occupies the first place in the designs of Providence, and that everything has been created for His honour and glory. On this account he is called in Scripture the first-born of every creature; and it is said that the Lord possessed Him in the beginning of His ways. By Him, and through Him, and for Him all things have been made and continue to subsist. "It was in consideration of this most desirable fruit," says St. Francis of Sales, "that the vine of the great Sovereign of Heaven has been planted; that is to say, that the universe has been created. The succession of generations which have been rolling on during so many ages resembles the blossoms and leaves which were to precede and assist in the production of that admirable fruit which the earth was destined to produce. Its excellence is extolled by the holy Spouse in the Canticle of Canticles, and its delicious qualities excite the admiration of men, and even of God Himself."

That our blessed Saviour is the source of every grace, and the author of our salvation, is a fundamental truth of Christianity. "Commencing from eternal glory, which is the crowning fruit of the tree, we descend from one grace to another, as from branch to branch, until we reach the root, which is our redemption through the merits of Jesus Christ. The Almighty grants glory as the result of merit; merit follows charity; charity succeeds penance; penance is the result of obedience and fidelity to our vocation; and our vocation follows the grace of redemption, on which this mysterious ladder rests. That part which stands on earth reposes on

the wounded side of our divine Saviour, who died for our salvation on Mount Calvary; and that which reaches heaven rests on the heart of the eternal Father, where the elect are received and glorified by our Redeemer. . . . . It is plain that all the benefits of supernatural Providence absolutely depend upon the redemption of our divine Saviour, who merited them for us, by the title of the strictest justice, when, in the spirit of love and obedience, He delivered Himself to death, even the death of the Cross. His passion and death are the root, from which proceed all the graces we receive; because, as members of Jesus Christ, we are engrafted on the tree growing out of this root, and by a necessary consequence, if we remain in Jesus Christ, we shall be enabled, by the life of grace which he communicates, to bear the fruit of that eternal glory which awaits us."

The venerable Father Blosius, deeply affected at the consideration of these sublime mysteries, thus addresses the Christian:—"Let the remembrance of the life which thy Saviour Jesus led upon earth be thy refreshment in labour, thy solace in grief, thy shield in temptation, and thy joy in contumely and reproach. Cherish at all times this recollection, as thou wouldst a jewel of the highest value,—Jesus Christ is the infinite source and well-spring of mercy; therefore a sinner who humbly, penitently, and trustfully drinks thereat, cannot fail to find refreshment for his parched and sin-stricken soul, even though it were seared, and polluted by the iniquity and guilt of a thousand worlds. If thy imperfect good works be piously united with Christ's infinite merits, the former will participate in the perfection of the latter, just as a drop of water mixed with wine acquires the more

generous taste and vinous colour of the juice of the grape. Constantly bear in mind the end for which Jesus lived, suffered, and died upon earth; think often of His compassion, clemency, tenderness, and mercy towards the sick, the afflicted, and in particular to poor sinners, and thou wilt never despair of salvation. Think often that thy Redeemer's labours and pains were endured for thee, an ungrateful wretch. For thy sake Jesus shed his blood and died upon a cross, submitting to a temporal death that thou mightst attain life eternal: He took upon Himself thy delinquencies, and cancelled thy outstanding debt, by fastening it to His cross." He parted with all His precious merits to enrich thy poverty-stricken soul. The remembrance of our dear Lord's most sacred passion and death affords a soothing balm to the grief-stricken soul. It alleviates the pains of a wounded heart, and is the perennial source of virtuous refreshment to those who are parched up with spiritual thirst. In fine, the recollection of the Crucified is the safeguard, hope, and refuge of those who aspire to Christian perfection. In severe sickness, or in proximate peril of death, remember thy Saviour's agony and pain; cling to His sacred cross; kiss with revering lips His crimson wounds; if thou therein concealest thy own sores, griefs, and losses, thou mayest set all Satan's attacks at defiance.

FIFTH DAY.

"Surely He has borne our infirmities and carried our sorrows." (a) —*The Prophet Isaias.*

"We have not a high priest who cannot have compassion on our infirmities, but one tempted in all things like as we are, without sin. Let us go therefore with confidence to the throne of grace, that we may obtain mercy and find grace in seasonable aid." (b) —*The Apostle St. Paul.*

With what confidence ought these most consoling words to fill our hearts! "We have not a priest," says the Apostle, "who has no feeling for our infirmities, but one who has Himself shared all our miseries, sin only excepted." Yes, truly does Jesus Christ know to the very bottom all our misery. He knows, even by his own experience, that we are but dust and ashes. He is not only very God, but true and perfect man; and as man He has Himself made trial of the weakness of our mortal nature. Who then can express the boundless compassion and tenderness He feels for us His miserable creatures? Why does not the very thought of this make us, as it were, out of ourselves for gladness? How is it that our hearts do not bound with feelings of the most lively joy and most unlimited confidence in our dearest and most loving Jesus? What words can express our blessed lot? At the right hand of God sits our divine High Priest, who cherishes in his heart at every moment sentiments of the most tender compassion for us, and offers up continually to His

(a) Is. liii. 4. (b) Heb. iv. 15, 16.

eternal Father His blood and His very life for our benefit.

St. Teresa thus describes the happy effect which the vision of our Lord in prayer had left in her soul:—"I began to have more love and more confidence in my Lord, after I had seen Him as one with whom I had held a familiar conversation. I saw that, though he was God, He was also man, and that He did not wonder at the weakness of man, for He well knows our miserable nature, which is subject to falls of so many kinds, on account of the first sin, which he came to repair. Although He is my Lord, I may still treat with Him as with a friend, because I know He is not like the grandees we are accustomed to meet in this world, who place all their graces in a certain affected authority, and who appoint hours and seasons for an audience, and admit to speak to them only persons of distinction. If a poor man has any business to transact with them, it will cost him many labours and troubles before he can get it settled. But what if he has some business with the king himself! Poor people must not presume to come near him, but be content to inquire who are his favourites, and to recommend their affairs to them. Oh, King of Glory, and Lord of all Kings, Thy kingdom is not set out with such straws as these, since it has no end. Nor need we introductions for an audience with Thee. Oh, Thou alone truly deservest to be called Lord!"

St. Jane Frances of Chantal felt great joy in often singing those psalms which express hope and confidence in God. Amongst others the following was the most familiar to her:—"To thee, O Lord, have I lifted up my soul. In thee, O my God, I put my trust: let me not be ashamed. Neither

let my enemies laugh at me, for none of them that wait on Thee shall be confounded." All her hope of eternal happiness was founded on Jesus Christ, on the love which He bore from all eternity to His creatures, and in the loving desire which He had of giving eternal life to those who co-operate with His grace. "These," said she, "are the corner-stones on which the solid house of our hope ought to be founded." She once spoke as follows to a very virtuous and devout person, who was living in a great dread of the judgments of God:—"I assure you, my dear father, that the sight of our Saviour dying for love on the cross, inspires me with confidence that He will make me live with love in glory. When I look at myself in myself, I tremble, and feel assured that, without God's assistance, I should merit hell; but when I look at myself at the foot of the cross, and embrace this sign of our salvation, the hope of heaven, which He has vouchsafed to me, is so lively, that I forget hell, and rarely indeed do I think of it. Of all the vices of which God has given me a horror, there is none I dread so much as despair, inasmuch as it is a deficiency of faith." The devout religious defended his fears by a number of reasons; but the blessed mother replied, "That excessive fear in souls already advanced in the devout life is a barrier to hope, and a cooling in charity; as humble hope in Jesus Christ is a spur to love. As for myself," said she, "I have ever acted on two maxims,—the one of David, the other of our blessed Father: the first, 'Do well, and hope in God;' the other, 'It is the will of God that our misery should be a throne for God's mercy.' Act, then, faithfully, on these two maxims, and never look up to heaven without hope.'" She had, also, a great

attraction to those words of Job: "Though he should kill me, yet will I hope in Him." She said that she had always uttered these words, and with much consolation, in her interior trials.

St. Catharine of Bologna recommended the same thing to her religious. "Confidence, in God," she used to say, "ought to be greater in proportion to the pressing nature of the necessity in which we are placed." This she confirms by the example of Jesus Christ, who, when suffering the unspeakable anguish of a most bitter passion, cried: "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" "Doubtless," she adds, "as He was at that time exhibiting a pattern of the highest perfection in the exact fulfilment of the obedience required from Him by His eternal Father, with whom He was wholly united, His intelligent soul enjoyed the most perfect bliss; still as a man, capable of suffering and mortal, He complains of His abandonment, or rather, he gives utterance to His perfect confidence in God, in order to teach us, His children, that the more afflicted we are the more we ought to rely on aid from above." Does not this consoling promise come from Him? "I am with the distressed in his tribulation, I will rescue him, and glorify him." How is it that we do not desire afflictions instead of fearing them, since we have for our companion a friend so gentle and so faithful in helping us if we call upon Him in our adversity?

This saint bore a particular devotion to, and placed a particular confidence in the most pure and adorable humanity of Christ, which she used to call the refuge of our souls, their medicine, their mirror, buckler, manna, ladder, and fountain, the very sweet olive tree which feeds them,

the sea upon which they may sail for ever, and, finally, their nurse, their mother, and spouse.

Oh! blessed for ever be the mercy and goodness of our bountiful Lord, who by His sacred passion and death has procured for us inexaustible treasures of grace and glory. All that He demands from us that we may obtain them is, that we ask Him for them with an entire confidence. And can anything be more reasonable? "Is it possible," writes Father Seupoli, "that the amiable Shepherd, Who for upwards of thirty-three years sought after the lost sheep, through rough and thorny ways, with so much pain that it cost him the last drop of his sacred blood; is it possible, I say, that so good a shepherd, seeing at last His strayed sheep returning to Him with a will to be guided for the future by Him alone, and with a sincere, though yet perhaps weak intention to obey him, should not look with pity upon it, listen to its cries, and bear it upon his shoulders to the fold? Doubtless He is greatly pleased to see it united again to the flock, and invites the angels to rejoice with Him in the event. For if He searches so diligently after the drachma, by which the sinner is figured in the Gospel, if he leaves nothing untouched to find it, can He reject those who, like sheep longing to behold their shepherd, return towards the fold? Can it be imagined that the spouse of our souls, who ardently seeks to take possession of our hearts, whose greatest delight is to communicate himself to us, and heap His blessings on us,—can it be imagined, I say, that He will deny our request, and refuse to come to us when we open him the door of our hearts, and beg to be honoured with His presence?"

SIXTH DAY.

"As I live, saith the Lord God, I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked turn from his way and live. Turn ye, turn ye, from your evil ways: and why will you die, O house of Israel." (a)—*God by the Prophet Ezechiel.*

"A sinner cannot outrage the Deity more than by despairing of divine mercy on account of the number and enormity of his crimes; for God's clemency is far greater than the iniquity and guilt of an entire world."—*Venerable Blosius.*

This holy man thus addresses the sinner: "Of God's mercy never despond; a countless multitude of the most shameful and enormous sins do not move divine indignation so much as one act of despair. The wretch who despairs adds to his other crimes by denying the Almightiness of God, outraging the clemency of his Saviour, and contemning the patience of the Holy Ghost."

Our Sovereign, Lord, Judge, Father, Friend, and Saviour, our God Himself, excepts no number or species of crimes. As often as a culprit truly repents, the contrite sinner's punishment is remitted; the humbled prodigal son is restored to his familiar place in his heavenly Father's household of faith; with a kiss of peace the penitent is introduced into a chamber of fraternal love, and made to sit down at a banquet of meat more savoury than the parable's fatted calf. The Lord, in his mercy, urges the procrastinating sinner to repentance, invites him to reconciliation, withdraws his menaces, remits the sinner's penalty, substitutes rewards for chastisement, and hastens to greet the returning penitent

(a) Ez. xxxiii. 11.

with an affectionate embrace. However ready a mortal may be to accept forgiveness for his crimes and follies, God is infinitely more willing to pardon him, provided he be truly penitent.

The language of Scripture on this point is most striking. "Be converted to me," says God, "and you shall be saved, all ye ends of the earth."(a) "Wash yourselves, be clean, take away the evil of your devices from my eyes, cease to do perversely. Learn to do well; seek judgment, relieve the oppressed, judge for the fatherless, defend the widow. And then come and accuse me, saith the Lord: if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made as white as snow; and if they be red as crimson, they shall be white as wool."(b) "If the wicked do penance for all his sins which he has committed, and keep all my commandments, and do judgment and justice, living he shall live, and shall not die. I will not remember all his iniquities that he has done; in his justice which he has wrought he shall live. Is it my will that a sinner should die, saith the Lord God, and not that he should be converted from his ways, and live?"(c)

Where is the sinner who, at the consideration of the merciful condescension of his Lord in inviting him to repentance, and offering him forgiveness and grace, does not feel animated with confidence in God, and willing to turn to Him with a humble and contrite heart?

"Think of the Lord in goodness, and seek him in simplicity of heart."(d) "With these words," writes St. Liguori, "the wise man exhorts us to have more confidence in the divine mercy than fear

(a) Is. xlv. 22.
(b) Id. i. 18.
(c) Ez. xviii. 21.
(d) Wisd. i. 1.

of the divine justice, since God is immensely more inclined to bestow favours on us than to chastise us. As St. James says: 'Mercy exalteth itself above judgment.'(a) Hence the apostle St. Peter admonishes us in our fears for our temporal and eternal interests to abandon ourselves entirely to the goodness of our God, who takes sovereign care of our salvation: 'Casting all your care upon Him, for he has care of you.'(b) How very applicable to this is the title which David gives to God when he calls Him our God, who is ready to save us: 'Our God is the God of salvation.'(c) This signifies, as Bellarmin explains it, that it is the property of God, not indeed to condemn, but to save all; for, while he threatens those with his displeasure who despise him, he promises, and hence cannot fail to show mercy to those who fear him, according to that of the Blessed Virgin in her canticle: 'His mercy is from generation to generation to them that fear him.' When you commit any fault," continues the saint, "be not ashamed to go and cast yourself immediately at the feet of your heavenly father, and beg his pardon for it. Think that God is so ready to pardon sinners, that he laments their loss when they depart from him and die to his grace; and hence he lovingly calls them, saying: 'Why will you die, O house of Israel? Return ye and live.'(d) He promises to receive the soul that has forsaken him, as soon as it shall return to his arms: 'Turn ye to me, and I will turn to you.'(e) Would that sinners knew with how much compassion our Lord waits to pardon them. 'The Lord waiteth that he may have

(a) James ii. 13.
(b) 1 Peter v. 7.
(c) Ps. lxvii. 21.
(d) Ez. xviii. 31.
(e) Zach. i. 3.

mercy upon you.' (a) Would that they were sensible of His desire not to chastise them, but to see them converted! He desires to embrace them and press them to His heart. He declares: 'As I live,' saith the Lord God, 'I desire not the death of the wicked, but that the wicked may turn from his way and live.'(b) He adds, through the prophet Isaias: 'And then come and accuse me,' saith the Lord: 'if your sins be as scarlet, they shall be made white as snow.'(c) As though he had said: 'Sinners, repent for having offended me, and then come to me: if I do not pardon you, accuse me, and treat me as being unfaithful to my promises. But, no; I shall not be wanting to my word; if you come, know that your consciences, though stained as crimson with your crimes, shall, by my grace, be made white as snow.' In fine, He has said, that when the sinner repents of having offended Him, He will forget all his sins: 'I will not remember all his iniquities that he hath done.'(d) As soon, then, as you fall into any fault, raise up your eyes to God, make an act of love, and humbly confessing your fault, firmly hope for pardon, saying to him: 'Lord, behold he whom thou lovest is sick.'(e) 'The heart which thou lovest is sick, is full of wounds: heal my soul, for I have sinned against Thee. Thou seekest after penitent sinners; behold one is at thy feet who seeks after Thee: the evil is committed, what must I do? Thou wilt not have me lose confidence, even after the sin which I have committed; Thou desirest my good, and I again love Thee; yes, my God, I love Thee with all my heart; I am sorry for my

(a) Is. xxx. 18.
(b) Ez. xxxiii. 11.
(c) Is. i. 18.
(d) Ez. xviii. 22.
(e) John xi. 3.

sin, and will never more offend Thee: Thou who art a God sweet and mild, and plenteous in mercy, pardon me; let me hear from Thee what Thou didst say to Magdalen: "Thy sins are forgiven thee," and give me strength for the future to be faithful to Thee.' Then cast your eyes upon Jesus Christ crucified, in order not to be discouraged; offer to the Eternal Father His merits, and confidently hope for pardon; since to pardon you He spared not His own Son. Say to Him, with confidence: 'Look on the face of Thy Christ; my God, have regard to Thy Son, who has died for me, and for His sake grant me pardon.'"

The author of the "Spiritual Combat" suggests the same thing: "The enemy," says he, "endeavours to strike us with terror, and to make us despair at the sight of our past sins. If you perceive yourself in any danger of this kind, take it as a general rule that when the remembrance of former crimes proceeds from divine grace, and is salutary, it tends to form in you sentiments of humility, compunction, and confidence in God's mercy. But know, likewise, that it certainly is suggested by the devil as often as it creates vexation and despondency, leaving you spiritless and daunted from the strong reason it offers to make you believe you are lost without any hopes of salvation. Think of nothing, in such circumstances, but of humbling yourself, and placing a greater confidence than ever in the boundless mercy of the Lord. This will entirely defeat the devil's stratagem, as it turns his own weapons against himself, and gives greater glory to God. It is true, you ought to be truly contrite for having offended his sovereign goodness as often as you call to mind your past iniquities; but you ought at the same

time to ask pardon with a firm confidence in your Saviour's merits. Even though it seems as if God said in your heart you are not of the number of his flock, still you must not cease to hope in Him, saying, with great humility: 'Lord, thou hast too much reason to reject me, and punish my sins to all eternity; but still I have greater reason to hope Thou wilt manifest thy mercy in me. I beseech, Thee, therefore, to spare a miserable wretch who deserves, indeed, to be for ever banished from Thee; but yet is dear to Thee as the purchase of thy precious blood. I desire to be saved, Oh blessed Redeemer, that I may bless Thee for ever in Thy glory; all my hopes are in Thee; to Thee do I abandon myself entirely; dispose of me as thou pleasest, my sovereign master; dispose of me, I say, as Thou pleasest; but however that be, I will hope in Thee, though Thou shouldst condemn me this very instant.'"

SEVENTH DAY.

"Have confidence. I have overcome the world." (a)—*Our Blessed Lord.*

"This is good and acceptable in the sight of God our Saviour, Who will have all men to be saved and to come to the knowledge of the truth. For there is one God and one Mediator of God and men, the man Christ Jesus: who gave Himself a redemption for all, a testimony in due times." (b)

"You are come to Mount Sion, and to the city of the living God, the heavenly Jerusalem, and to the company of many thousands of angels; and to the church of the first-born, who are written in the heavens, and to God the judge of all, and to the spirits of the just made perfect; and to Jesus the Mediator of the New Testament, and to the sprinkling of blood, which speaketh better than that of Abel." (c)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

THESE words ought to encourage us to approach God with filial confidence, trusting in the mediation of His incarnate Son Jesus Christ, who gave Himself a redemption for our sins, as well as for those of the whole world. "Do not forget," writes the venerable Father Avila, "that between the eternal Father and us there is a mediator, Jesus Christ, to whom we are united by the strongest chains of love, which nothing can break, if man himself do not break them by mortal sin. The blood of Jesus Christ cries out for mercy for us; and its cry is so strong, that the noise of our sins is not heard. The death of Jesus Christ hath washed away all our crimes. 'O death! I will be thy death.'" We shall not be lost for want of atonement, but for want of profiting by it, and of

(a) John xvi. 33. (b) 1 Tim. ii. 3-6.
(c) Heb. xii. 22-24.

applying to our souls the inexhaustible merits of the satisfaction of Christ.

Jesus Christ assumed the charge of repairing our evils, as if it were an affair which was properly His own; He has taken upon himself our sins, as if they were His own; He has asked forgiveness of them from His divine Father; and He has besought Him, with as much love as if He were praying for Himself, to love all those who wished to approach Him. God, for His prayers, has granted that Jesus and we should be so united as to have to undergo one and the same fate of love or hatred; and as Jesus Christ is not and cannot be hated, so, if we remain united to Him by love, we also shall be loved; for Jesus Christ being loved by God, we also are loved by Him. Jesus is better able to induce His divine Father to love us than we are to compel Him to hate us; for God loves His Son much more than He hates sinners. Jesus said to His Father: "My Father, I wish that those whom Thou hast given Me should be where I am."(a) Love exceeds hatred. We have received forgiveness, and an assurance, founded on the love which God bears us, that we shall never be abandoned. Can a mother forget her son? "Well, I assure you," says the Lord,(b), "that even if she should, I will not forget you, because I have you written in my hands." Yes, the Saviour has written us in His hands with His own blood. For this reason let us not be troubled at anything; everything is directed by those hands which have been nailed to the cross for us as a testimony of love. Nothing can give us so much trouble, that Jesus Christ is not able to

(a) John xvii. 24. (b) Isaias xlix. 15.

remove it. If I am terrified by my past sins, by a fear of the future, by the snares which the devils lay for me, I will have recourse to the mercy of my God, who has loved me even unto death, and I will place all my confidence in Him. He has undoubtedly a regard for me, since He has given himself entirely for my salvation. Oh, Jesus! assured refuge of all those who seek Thee in the time of need, divine shepherd of our souls, we deceive ourselves if we do not hope in Thee; when we have a sincere desire of amendment Thou hast said: "I am the Lord, do not fear; it is I who afflict and who console you. I sometimes send my servants desolations which resemble a hell; but these are afterwards withdrawn, and I comfort them. I am your advocate; your cause is mine. I am your surety, and I have paid all your debts. I am your master, and I have purchased you with My own blood; not for the purpose of forsaking, but enriching you, after having been bought at so dear a price. How can I withdraw from him who seeks Me; I who went to meet those who sought Me to insult Me? I did not turn away My face from him who buffeted it; and shall I turn it away from him who comes to love and honour Me? How can you doubt that I love you, when you see Me in the hands of My enemies for your love? Have you ever seen Me despise him who loved Me, or abandon him who besought Me for assistance? Know you not that I go out to search for him even who does not seek for Me?"

One great mark of our confidence in God is, to treat familiarly with Him as with our kind benefactor and loving father. "When you receive any agreeable news," writes St. Liguori, "do not act like some unfaithful and ungrateful souls who, in

time of prosperity, forget and forsake Him. Be as faithful to Him as you would be to a loving friend who rejoices in your good; go and communicate to Him your gladness, and praise and thank Him, acknowledging all as coming from His hands. Rejoice in your happiness, because it comes to you from His good pleasure, and thus rejoice and be glad solely in Him: 'I will rejoice in the Lord; and I will joy in God my Jesus.'(a) Say to Him: 'My Jesus, I bless Thee, and will for ever bless Thee, for the many favours which Thou hast bestowed upon me, when I deserved from Thee not favours, but punishments for the offences which I had committed against Thee.' Say to Him, with the sacred spouse: 'All fruits, the new and the old, my beloved, I have kept for Thee.'(b) 'I thank Thee, O Lord, and will ever remember Thy past and present benefits, to honour, thank, and glorify Thee for all eternity.' Consult God with confidence in every doubt that may occur to you, either concerning yourself or others, as you would a true friend; never fail to beseech Him to enlighten you as to what will be most pleasing in His sight. Say to Him: 'Put Thou words in my mouth, and strengthen the resolution in my heart.'(c) 'O Lord, make known to me what Thou wouldst have me do, and I will obey Thy will. Speak, Lord, for Thy servant heareth! my heart is ready — O Lord, my heart is ready!' Confide in Him, so as to recommend to Him not only your own necessities, but those also of others. How pleasing will it be to Jesus if, sometimes forgetful of your own interests, you choose to speak to Him of His own glory, of the

(a) Habac. iii. 18. (b) Cant. vii. 13.
(c) Jud. ix. 13.

wants of others, especially of those who mourn in tribulation, of the souls, His spouses, who are in purgatory, who sigh to behold Him, and of poor sinners who are deprived of His grace! Say to Him, particularly for these: 'Lord, Thou art so amiable, that Thou art worthy of infinite love; and how canst Thou then endure to behold so many souls in the world, upon whom Thou bestowest so many benefits, who desire not to know Thee, nor to love Thee, who even offend Thee and despise Thee! Ah! my most amiable God, cause Thyself to be known, cause Thyself to be loved. Hallowed be Thy name, Thy kingdom come; may Thy name be adored and loved by all, and may Thy love reign in the hearts of all. Suffer me not to depart without granting me some grace for the unhappy souls for whom I pray.' In a word, if you desire to delight the loving heart of Jesus, be careful constantly to speak to Him, and with the greatest confidence. Surely He will not disdain to answer you and converse with you. He will not, indeed, make His voice audible to your corporeal sense of hearing, but very intelligible to your heart, when you withdraw yourself from the conversation of creatures to entertain yourselves only with Him. 'I will lead Her into solitude, and I will speak to Her heart.'(a) He will speak to you by those inspirations, those internal lights, those manifestations of His bounty, those sweet impressions in the heart, those marks of pardon, those feelings of peace, those hopes of Heaven, those interior rejoicings, that sweetness of His grace, or those loving embraces; in a word, by those expressions of love which are well understood by those who love, and who seek only Him."

(a) Osee ii. 14.

EIGHTH DAY.

"My little children, these things I write to you that you may not sin. But if any man sin, we have an advocate with the Father, Jesus Christ the just; and He is the propitiation for our sins: and not for ours only, but also for those of the whole world." (a) —*The Apostle St. John.*

"When a Christian falls into sin, he should not seek to hide himself, as it were, or yield to desponding reflections; let him rather confidently cast himself at our blessed Lord's feet, and humbly acknowledge his delinquency and ingratitude. Mindful of his natural weakness and corruption, let him meditate on God's infinite compassion towards repenting sinners, whose hearts, when truly contrite and humble, He never despises. The Lord is a physician, who heals the wounds of those who lovingly trust in His boundless and ineffable compassion. In the mellifluous wounds of his benign and merciful Saviour, Jesus, a penitent should abide and rest. A loving and humble appeal to those glorious scars on His sacred body is assuredly more pleasing to Christ than the sweetest sounds of vocal and instrumental music to a weary mortal."—*Venerable Blosius.*

This blessed man says that St. Gertrude, thinking what of the many things revealed to her by Jesus Christ it might be best to make known to men, heard an interior voice saying, "It would be most useful for them to remember that I am continually interceding with My Father for their salvation, and that I offer up My most pure heart in expiation every time their hearts are stained by evil thoughts through human frailty; and that when they commit sinful actions, I present to My Father my nail-pierced hands; and thus I immediately seek to appease His divine wrath, so that they may obtain His pardon through repentance."

Whatever may be the state of our conscience,

(a) 1 John ii. 1, 2.

however great may be our guilt and sinfulness before God, let us approach with confidence to the throne of grace, and we shall find mercy in a seasonable time. Yes, if Satan unhappily lead us into sin; if, seduced by the allurements of passion, we have deserted the path of justice, let us not despair of finding mercy; but let us lift up our hearts, full of confidence and sorrow, to Jesus, who is at the right hand of God, and He will make intercession for us. Oh! what consolation ought we to feel when we remember that Jesus pleads our cause before the throne of His divine Father; that He solicits mercy and forgiveness for us; that He continually presents to God, in our behalf, His own bitter sufferings, His own sacred blood once shed for us on Calvary; that "blood which speaks for us better than that of Abel!" The blood of Abel cried for vengeance upon him that shed it; but the blood of Jesus calls for mercy on all sinners, even for those wretches who poured it forth. "Yes," says St. Bernard, "Jesus continually shows to His Father those wounds which He received for us in obedience to His commands, and conjures Him, by the merit of those wounds, not to suffer that man to perish for whom He paid so costly a price."

How often did Almighty God show mercy to His rebellious people of old, at the prayer of His servant Moses! How often was His wrath and indignation appeased by the tears and supplications of that His holy servant! How many blessings and favours did He not shower down upon His chosen people in consideration of the services of Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob! Oh! then, what may we not expect from that same God of mercy, if Jesus intercede in our behalf; if

this, His only Son, in whom He is well pleased, plead our cause? What can the Father refuse to such a Son? "Since, then, we have for our High Priest, for our mediator and intercessor, Jesus the Son of God, who has penetrated the heavens, let us go with confidence to the throne of His grace, that we may obtain mercy, and find favour in the time of need." Yes, let us in all our troubles and afflictions run with loving confidence to this our beloved Redeemer, and beseech Him to undertake our cause; and we shall not be rejected. Let us present ourselves before our heavenly Father as Jacob approached his aged parent, clothed in the garments of our elder brother, covered and protected by His merits, and we shall not fail to receive mercy and grace, and obtain a rich and plentiful blessing.

Oh, the great, the inestimable treasure which God has bestowed upon man in giving him His only Son! Oh! sublime and most excellent gift, bringing to man every good, enriching him with every blessing. "Yes," says St. Ambrose, "in Jesus Christ we possess every good; He is all things to us. If you would heal your wounds, He is a physician; if the heat of your fever burns you, He is a fountain of living water; if the weight of your iniquities oppress you, He is justice; if you stand in need of help, He is power and strength; if you fear death, He is life; if you would go to heaven, He is the way; if you wish to avoid darkness, He is the light; if you desire to eat, He is heavenly food. In fine, whatsoever you stand in need of, and whatsoever you can desire, you find in Him."

It is related that St. Bernard, in a severe sickness, was wrapt in spirit, and seemed to be led

before God's tribunal, where the devil accused him, and maintained that he merited not the possession of eternal glory. "I confess," replied the saint, "that I am, indeed, unworthy of it, and of myself have no right whatsoever to it; but Jesus Christ my Saviour has a right to it for two reasons: first, because He is the only Son of the eternal Father, and heir of the celestial kingdom; and, secondly, because He has purchased it by His blood, obeying his Father unto death. The first of these two titles was sufficient for Him, and the other He has made over to me; and it is by virtue of this gift and grant to me, that I now lay claim to heaven, and hope to obtain it." The hellish accuser remained confounded at the answer, and presently this vision of judgment vanished, and the saint came to himself.

NINTH DAY.

"Behold the Lamb of God, behold Him who taketh away the sin of the world." (a)—*St. John the Baptist.*

"He gave Himself for us that He might redeem us from all iniquity, and might cleanse to Himself a people acceptable, a pursuer of good works." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

Oh, what a subject of sweet confidence to the heart of the sinner is the passion and death of Jesus Christ!

St. Ligouri, animated by the liveliest hope, and rapt into an ecstacy of love by this inspiring subject, thus writes:—"Before the Saviour appeared upon earth, David had already placed all his confidence in Him, and said, 'Into Thy hands, O Lord, I commend my spirit; Thou hast redeemed me, O God of Truth.' (c) With how much greater reason should we confide in Jesus Christ—we who know that He has come, and accomplished the work of redemption! Let us then speak to Him with more confidence, and incessantly repeat the words of the Prophet. If our sins give us reason to fear eternal death, the merits of Jesus Christ afford us much stronger grounds for confidence. His merits are infinite, and incomparably more powerful to save us than our sins are to destroy us. By sinning we have deserved hell, but the Redeemer has come to charge Himself with all our crimes, and to expiate them by His sufferings.

"At the moment we committed sin, God wrote

(a) John i. 29. (a) Tit. ii. 14.
(c) Ps. xxx. 6.

down the sentence of our condemnation to eternal death. But what did Jesus Christ? He took this sentence and fastened it to His cross.(a) He blotted it out with His own blood, in order that we might never think of our condemnation without looking at the cross on which the decree was destroyed, and thus conceive hopes of pardon and eternal salvation.

"Oh, how much more powerful is the blood of Jesus to obtain mercy for us from God, than the blood of Abel was to call for vengeance upon Cain! (b) O how happy you are, poor sinners, to be able to have recourse to Jesus crucified; who has poured out all His blood to render Himself a mediator of peace between God and man, and to obtain for you the pardon of your crimes! Your iniquities, it is true, cry out for vengeance against you; but the precious blood of the Redeemer pleads in your favour, and the divine justice is necessarily appeased by the voice of this precious blood.

"We have, I admit, a rigorous account to give of our sins; but who will be our judge? (c)—Let us be comforted; it is the Redeemer Himself whom God has appointed to judge us. Thus St. Paul encourages us, saying: 'Who is the judge that is to condemn us? Will Jesus Christ condemn us, who shed his blood for our salvation? Jesus, who to rescue us from eternal ruin has condemned Himself to a cruel and ignominious death? Jesus, who to deliver us from eternal death still continues to intercede for us in heaven with God His Father?' 'What do you fear, sinners,' says St. Thomas of

(a) Coloss. ii. 14. (b) Heb. xii. 24.
(c) John v. 22.

Villanova, 'if you detest your sins? How can Jesus condemn you, who died that He might not condemn you? How can He reject you, if you return to Him who came down from heaven to seek you, when you were flying from him?'

"Our weakness makes us tremble lest we should yield to future temptations. Behold the remedy pointed out by St. Paul: 'Let us go to the combat with our eyes fixed on Jesus Christ crucified, who from the summit of His cross offers us His assistance, victory, and reward.' (a) If we have fallen during our past life, it is because we have neglected to consider the wounds and the ignominies of the Redeemer, and to ask assistance from Him. But if henceforth we think of all He has suffered for love of us, and of His anxiety to assist us when we have recourse to Him, we assuredly shall not be overcome by our enemies. St. Teresa said: 'I cannot conceive how one can fear the devil so much, since we have only to invoke the holy name of God to make him tremble.' But she also said: 'All our efforts will avail nothing if we do not renounce every confidence in ourselves, and place it in God alone.'

"We have, in the passion and death of Jesus, a stupendous treasury of hope and love, a support which we could not even imagine, unless we were assured of it by faith. What! an all-powerful God to become man, to shed all His blood and to expire in torment on an infamous gibbet!—and for what purpose? To expiate our sins, to save us,—worms of the earth and rebels against His divine majesty! And still to His love this is but little: He wished to give us His very body that was

(a) Heb. xii. 2.

sacrificed, and His very blood which He shed on the cross, as our food, in order that He might be thus entirely united to us! Great God! these two mysteries ought to inflame and consume the hearts of all mankind with love. Where is the sinner, however criminal, that can despair of his pardon if he repent of his sins, when he beholds a God so full of love for men, and so inclined to do them good? This is what inspired St. Bonaventure with so much confidence when he said, 'How can He who has done and suffered so much for my salvation refuse me the necessary graces?'

"'Let us go then with confidence to the throne of grace, in order to obtain there mercy.'(a) The throne of grace is the cross, on which Jesus Christ sits, as it were on a throne, to distribute His graces and mercies to all who shall have recourse to Him. But we should hasten to it more speedily, now that we have it in our power to find there the necessary helps for salvation: perhaps if we delay longer, we shall have no more time to obtain them. Let us, then, hasten to embrace the cross of Jesus Christ; let us go thither with great confidence; let us not be prevented by the sight of our sins; we shall find in Jesus Christ all riches and all graces.

"The death of Jesus Christ has conferred advantages upon us much more considerable than the injuries which the devil has caused to be inflicted on us by sin. This is expressly declared by the Apostle St. Paul, who says: 'Where sin hath abounded, there grace did more abound.'(b) Why then should we not hope to obtain everything by virtue of the merits of the Saviour? He has Himself assured us that everything we ask from

(a) Heb. iv. 16. (b) Rom. v. 20.

God His Father in His name will be granted to us. (a) How can the divine Father refuse us anything,—He who has given us His only Son, whom He loved as dearly as Himself! The Apostle says that with Him He has given us all things. No grace, therefore, is excepted; neither pardon, nor perseverance, nor divine love, nor perfection, nor heaven itself. But we must pray: 'God is full of bounty to those who invoke Him.'" (b)

TENTH DAY.

"What is man that Thou shouldst magnify him, or why dost Thou set Thy heart upon him?". (c)—*Holy Job.*

"Oh how good and sweet it is to dwell in the heart of Jesus! I will give all things, all the thoughts of my mind, and all the affections of my heart, casting them all into the heart of Jesus, and this heart most tenderly will support me."—*St. Bernard.*

The sacred heart of Jesus is a burning furnace of love, an inexhaustible fountain of grace, and a source of unlimited confidence, for the just and the sinner. St. Mectildas says: "The Son of God appeared to me one day, holding in His hand His own heart, more resplendent than the sun, and diffusing rays of light all around; and He gave me to understand that it was from this divine heart all those graces flowed which God incessantly pours on man."

(a) John xvi. 23. (b) Rom. x. 12.
(c) Job vii. 17.

Our Lord appeared one day to the venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque, and disclosing to her His sacred heart, said: "Behold this heart, which has loved men so much that it has spared nothing, but exhausted itself to satisfy its love; and yet I meet no other return from the greater number of men than ingratitude, contempt, irreverence, and sacrilege, even in the very Sacrament of My love. But what is still more painful, I suffer this from persons who have been especially consecrated to My service. I demand, then, that the first Friday after the Octave of the Holy Sacrament be devoted to honour my heart by an act of reparation, and that the Holy Communion be received, in order to atone for the indignities it has suffered whilst exposed on the altars; and I promise that this heart will dilate itself, to diffuse abundantly the influence of its divine love on those who will render to it this honour." "But, my Saviour," said the humble religious, "to whom do you address yourself? to a vile creature, to a poor sinner, who, by her unworthiness, can only prevent the accomplishment of your design? Have you not many fervent, generous souls, to whom you may intrust this heavenly work?" "Fear not," said our Lord; "for I employ the weak to confound the strong; and it is ordinarily the poor and the humble whom I render the instruments of My greatest works, that they may not attribute the glory to themselves."

The holy servant of God conceived from that time the most lively confidence in the heart of Jesus, and wished to excite the same in the hearts of all men. In one of her letters she writes thus to a devout person:—"You must place all your confidence in the loving heart of Jesus, which is an

abyss where everything may be found; it is especially an abyss of love, in which every other love should be swallowed up,—above all, self-love, with its evil effects, which are human respect, and the desire of raising and satisfying ourselves. In burying these inclinations in the abyss of divine love, you will find all the treasures necessary for you, according to your different positions."

Again, to another who was labouring under severe trials, she writes as follows:—"If you are in an abyss of privation and desolation, this divine heart is an abyss of all consolation, in which we must lose ourselves if we wish to share in its sweetness. If you are in an abyss of dryness and weakness, go bury yourself in the heart of Jesus Christ, which is an abyss of power and love, and you will taste the suavity of this love when He pleases. If you are in an abyss of poverty and deprivation of everything, bury yourself in the heart of Jesus; it is filled with treasures; it will enrich you if you permit it to do so. If you are in an abyss of weakness, of failings, of miseries, go also frequently to the heart of Jesus; it is an abyss of mercy and strength; it will relieve and fortify you. If you are conscious that you are filled with pride, and a vain esteem of yourself, bury these quickly in the deep humiliations of the heart of Jesus; that humble heart is the abyss of humility. If you find yourself in an abyss of ignorance and darkness, the heart of Jesus is an abyss of light and knowledge; learn especially to love Him, and to do only what He desires of you. If you are in an abyss of infidelity and inconstancy, that heart of Jesus is one of constancy and fidelity; bury yourself there, and you will find a love constant in loving us, and in doing us good. If you feel, as it were, buried

in death, go to the heart of Jesus; you will find there an abyss of life, and you will draw thence a new life, by which you will regard everything with the eyes of Jesus Christ; you will no longer act but as He prompts you; you will speak but with His tongue; you will love but with His heart. If you are in an abyss of ingratitude, again, draw from the heart of Jesus wherewith to offer to God for all the benefits you have received from Him, and beg of Jesus to supply your want from His abundance. If you find yourself overwhelmed with agitation, impatience, or anger, go to the heart of Jesus, which is an abyss of patience. If you are in an abyss of dissipation and distraction, you will find in the heart of Jesus an abyss of recollection and fervour, which will supply everything, which will fill your heart and imagination by uniting them to Him. If you find yourself plunged in an abyss of sadness, bury it in the heart of Jesus, which is an abyss of heavenly joy, and the treasury of all the delights of the saints and angels. If you are in trouble and uneasiness, the divine heart is an abyss of peace, and that peace will be communicated to you. If you are in an abyss of bitterness and suffering, unite them to the abyss of the infinite sufferings of the heart of Jesus, and you will learn to suffer with Him, and to be contented to suffer. When you are in an abyss of fear, the heart of Jesus is an abyss of confidence and love; abandon yourself to it; you will there learn that fear should yield to love. Finally, everywhere, and in everything, bury yourself in this ocean of love and charity, and, if possible, never depart from it, that you may be penetrated with the fire by which this heart is inflamed for God and man, as the iron in the furnace, or as

a sponge cast into the sea, and filled with its waters."

To another, who appeared uneasy at the consideration of her misery, she writes thus:—"Once more, my dear friend, do not be troubled at your faults; but when you have committed any, say in all confidence to the loving heart of Jesus, 'O, my only love, have pity on Thy poor slave, and repair the evil I have just committed; make it turn to Thy glory, the edification of my neighbour, and the salvation of my soul.' In this manner our faults are sometimes very useful to us, by humbling us, and teaching us what we are, and how useful it is for us to be hidden in the abyss of our nothingness."

ELEVENTH DAY.

"My delight is to be with the children of men." (a)—*The Wise Man.*

"He is not far from every one of us. For in Him we live, and move, and have our being." (b)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

St. Ligouri thus comments on these words: "God, by his immensity, is in all places; but there are two principally in which He more especially resides: one is the highest heaven, where He is present by His glory, which he communicates to the blessed; the other is upon the earth, and is within the humble soul that loves Him. 'He

(a) Prov. viii. 31. (b) Acts xvii. 27, 28.

dwelleth in the high and holy place, and with a contrite and humble spirit.' "(a) Our God, then, dwelleth in the highest heavens, but disdains not to spend days and nights with His fathful servants, imparting to them His divine consolations, of which one alone far surpasses all worldly delights, and which those only do not desire who have not experienced them. "Oh! taste and see that the Lord is sweet."(b)

"Accustom yourself, O Christian soul, to speak to God with confidence and with love as to your dearest friend, who of all others loves you the most. His delight is to be with you, and it should be yours to be with Him, and to spend your life with Him with whom you hope to spend a happy eternity. Your God is always nigh to you, even within you. There is no screen through which He desires to be spoken to; on the contrary, He delights in your treating confidently with Him. Treat with Him of your affairs, of your designs, of your trials, of your fears, and of whatever concerns you. Do it, above all, with confidence, with an open heart, because God does not usually speak to the soul that does not speak to Him; since, not being accustomed to treat with Him, she would hardly understand His voice were He to speak to her. And of this our Lord complains: 'Our sister is little. What shall we do with our sister in the day when she is to be spoken to?' (c) 'Our sister is a child in my love: what shall we do by speaking if she does not understand me?' God would have us regard Him as our Almighty and most terrible Lord when we despise His grace,

(a) Is. lvii. 15. (b) Ps. xxxiii. 9.
(c) Cant. viii. 8.

but as our most loving friend when we love Him; and He then desires that we should speak to Him frequently, in a familiar manner, and without restraint. It is true that God ought always to be treated with the most sovereign respect; but when He so favours you as to make you sensible of His presence, and of His desire that you should speak to Him as to one who, above all others, loves you, express to Him your sentiments freely and with confidence. 'She preventeth them that covet her, so that she first showeth herself unto them.' (a) He, without waiting for you to go to Him when you desire His love, prevents you, and presents Himself to you, bringing with Him the graces and remedies which are necessary for you. He waits only for you to speak to Him to show you that He is nigh to you, and ready to be united with you and to console you. 'The eyes of the Lord are upon the just, and his ears unto their prayers.'

"Other friends in this world can converse together only at certain times; at others they must be separated; but between God and you, if you will there need never be any separation. 'Thou shalt rest, and thy sleep shall be sweet.....For the Lord will be at thy side.' (b) You may sleep, and God will place Himself at your side, and will watch continually for you. 'I shall repose myself with her; for her conversation has no bitterness, nor her company any tediousness, but joy and gladness.' (c) When you repose He departs not from your pillow; but is there ever thinking of you, in order that when you awake in the night, He may speak to you by His holy inspirations, and receive from

(a) Wisd. vi. 14. (b) Prov. iii. 24, 26.
(c) Wisd. viii. 16.

you some act of love, of oblation, or of gratitude, thus to keep up with you, even in the hours of rest, His lovely and sweet conversation. And sometimes even while you sleep He will speak to you, and will make His voice audible, in order that when you awake you may obey it. 'I will speak to him in a dream.' (a)

"He is with you in the morning to hear from you some word of love or confidence, to be the depository of your first thoughts, and of all the actions which you propose to perform during the day to please Him; as also of all the trials which you offer willingly to undergo for His love and glory. But as He fails not to present Himself to you the moment you awake, do not fail on your part immediately to turn yourself lovingly to Him, and to rejoice at hearing from Him, that He is not at a distance from you, as when you were in sin, but that He loves you, and desires to be loved by you, intimating to you at the same moment the lovely precept: 'Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with thy whole heart.' (b)

"Never, therefore, be forgetful of His sweet presence; but speak to Him as frequently as you can. He will not be wearied with you, nor will He, like the Lords of the earth, disdain you. If you love Him, you will not be at a loss what to say to Him. Tell him whatever occurs to you respecting yourself and your affairs, as you speak to a dear friend. Do not regard Him as a haughty prince, who will treat only with the grandees of the world and of great things; our God is pleased to abase Himself to treat with us, and is pleased with our communicating to Him our most minute and trivial

(a) Num. xii. 6. (b) Deut. vi. 5.

affairs. He loves you as much, and has as much care of you, as though he had no others to think of but you. He is as much devoted to your interests as though His Providence were to succour only you, His omnipotence to help only you, His mercy and goodness to compassionate only you, to promote your welfare, and to gain, by His endearing ways, your confidence and your love. Freely, therefore, discover to Him the whole of your interior, and beseech Him so to guide you that you may perfectly follow His will, and that all your desires and intentions may be solely directed to please Him, and to gratify His divine heart. "Bless God at all times, and desire Him to direct thy ways, and that all thy counsels may abide in Him."(a)

TWELFTH DAY.

"Let all them be glad that hope in Thee: they shall rejoice for ever, and Thou shalt dwell in them." (b)—*Holy David.*

"It is very necessary for this weak nature to have great confidence in God, and not to be dismayed, but to remember that, if we act with courage, we shall come off with victory."—*St. Teresa.*

Blessed Mariano Sozzini used to say, that in proportion to our hope and confidence in God we shall obtain His favour and assistance.

This holy man, considering the mischief of lan-

(a) Tob. iv. 20. (b) Ps. v. 12.

guor to a soul who allows her confidence in God to be weakened, said: "If we give way to that great delusion of letting ourselves grow weak in hope and confidence in God, it will follow that we shall less experience the favour and assistance of God, and consequently we shall work imperfectly, wearily, and with much labour, and with the danger of not persevering; whereas hope increases merit, adds strength and vigour in the most difficult works, and carries perseverance with it." He desired that all should often ask of God a generous and filial confidence in Him, and that under the most adverse circumstances we should cast ourselves into the arms of God, as a child into the arms of his mother, and that, after the example of Abraham, we should hope against hope. To a religious who, in a letter, communicated to him the distresses of his soul, which had fallen into extreme diffidence, he replied: "You should remember how St. Thomas, and all theologians, asking in what Christian hope is founded, reply, that it is founded in three things,—the wisdom, the power, and the goodness of God; because we know that God knows us, and has the power and will to save us. And, passing to another question, Whether we can suppose a case of a person hoping in God, and being disappointed in his hopes; they reply that this is impossible, because it is directly repugnant to the perfection of those divine attributes, Wisdom, Power, and Goodness, as though He either knew not how to save those who trust in Him, or were unable or unwilling to do so. Let us add, that it is also repugnant to His attribute of Truth, as He has so many times promised in the Scripture that He will save those who hope in Him. Neither must you tell me, that were this

the case no one would be damned, because the Wisdom, Power, Goodness, and Veracity of God are always the same; for it is true that many Christians are damned, and that for two reasons, either because they do not hope, or because they presume. There can be no doubt that the will to commit grievous sins, obstinately and impenitently, is incompatible with hope, and degenerates into presumption; wherefore this would not be to hope virtuously, but to presume rashly." The exercise of hope had become so familiar to this servant of God by the frequent acts which he made, that he found great facility and consolation in them, and he was chiefly aided in these acts by the following considerations:—

"1. Comparing the divine mercy with my necessities, I find that the divine mercy is beyond comparison greater than my miseries.

"2. The Passion of my Saviour infinitely outweighs all my sins.

"3. The Lord has vouchsafed to promise me salvation in many places of holy Scripture, and this His simple word ought to suffice; nor can I doubt it without grievously offending Him.

"4. God expressly commands me to hope in Him. This precept is enough to make me hope unflinchingly in Him, and though a hundred millions of reasons may oppose this, I wish always to live and die in hope, simply because God commands me to do so; and I will always declare, without hesitation, that I should be mad, my brain mad, and all the world mad, if they would tempt me to the contrary.

"5. And lastly, it is certain that I give great glory to God by my hope; since by this I honour His Wisdom, His Power, and His Goodness, and

also greatly honour His Passion, whilst I profess to believe that a single drop of His most precious blood could save a soul most worthy of hell for a thousand causes."

With these well-established grounds of hope deeply rooted in his heart by prayer and meditation, the blessed man, at the close of his life, felt himself so strengthened in this virtue, that whilst he was lying on his death-bed he invited all his visitors to Paradise, and that as freely as though he already possessed a certain earnest of his salvation.

The blessed Paul of the Cross was animated by the same spirit. As he was labouring with great zeal in the foundation of his holy congregation of the sacred Passion of Jesus, God permitted that all his companions, with the exception of one, should abandon him. Doubtless this was a heavy blow to the servant of God; but hope was strong within him, and his trustful spirit was not easily shaken. "Our vessel," he said, in a letter to one of his friends, "is upon the open sea, with neither sails nor oars; but it is guided by the Great Captain, who knows how to conduct it to a safe harbour. We are in the midst of storms and tempests; but His wisdom and His might shine all the brighter for the perils which encompass us. Blessed be God for giving us something to suffer for His love. The works with which He inspires us must struggle with difficulties, in order that they may exhibit the magnificence of His power. The more our labours cost us, the higher will they soar. *Dominus mortificat et vivificat, deducit ad inferos et reducit.* Let us all pray one for another, that we may conquer the enemies that stand in battle array against us, and that victory may be given us through

Jesus Christ our Lord. May the most holy will of God be ever accomplished in us, for that is the great end of a devout life. May we despise ourselves, and be closely united with His blessed will."

Speaking, one day, to his religious during recreation of a violent hurricane which was raised against them, he seemed unable to contain his spiritual joy, and said: "Sometimes it happens that a great thunderbolt, darting from the clouds, falls upon a barren mountain, and behold a mine of gold is discovered; let us hope that this storm may produce in us a similar mine, and that our Lord may work our greater good through it." With these sentiments of confidence and conformity to the divine will he patiently submitted to the labour and fatigue which this opposition cost him, replying to numbers of letters, and taking all the means of defence which Christian prudence dictated. Opening his heart to Father Fulgenzio di Gesú, a man of marvellous sanctity, he wrote in the following words: "Our affairs go on as usual; the tempest still threatens us, but we shall gain the victory in Christ, after having endured great humiliation and having seen our cause, as it were, almost overthrown; but let us continue to pray. Oh, how much do I love those souls who walk in pure and simple faith, abandoned in the hands of God!" Another time he wrote thus: "Oh! how noble an exercise is it to annihilate ourselves before our Lord in pure faith, and to cast our nothingness into that great All which is God; and to lose ourselves in the ocean of His charity, and to have our souls entirely penetrated with His love; to be transformed into Jesus Christ, and to make His sufferings and His sorrows ours. This is a

lofty lesson; but God teaches it to all those who wish to learn it. The language of love is fire, which burns, liquefies, and consumes itself as a holocaust before God; then the gentle breath of the Holy Spirit stirs up our worthless ashes, and raises them till they are lost in the abyss of the Divinity. Oh, happy loss! Oh, fortunate soul, thus absorbed in infinite love! All this is done purely by faith, and God teaches it to meek souls."

"Some there are," he added, "who visit with great devotion holy places and solemn shrines. I do not condemn their piety, but I would remind them that faith teaches us that our own interior is also a sanctuary, because it is the living temple of God, and the dwelling of the Most Holy Trinity. Let us enter, then, into this temple, and adore our Lord there in spirit and in truth: this is a most sublime devotion."

He was constantly saying to one or other of his community, "*Justus autem ex fide vivit; vos estis templum Dei vivi.* Make frequent visits to this interior sanctuary, and see that the lamps be ever burning there. These lamps," he used to explain, "were the three virtues of faith, hope, and charity." At other times he would say, with pious pleasantry, "Stay in your own house, go to your own home!" And if he was not immediately understood he would continue, "Ah, your house is your soul, the temple in which the living God dwells by faith."

THIRTEENTH DAY.

"Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He shall sustain thee." (a)—*Holy David.*

"God guards with special protection a confiding client, and such an one may be sure no evil will betide him."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

"BECAUSE he hoped in Me, says the Lord, I will deliver him; I will protect him because he hath known My Name. He shall cry to Me, and I will hear him: I am with him in tribulation, I will deliver him, and I will glorify him. I will fill him with length of days; and I will show him My salvation." (b) To St. Catherine the Lord one day said: "Think thou of Me, and I will think of thee, and take care of thy interests." The holy Bishop Hugh declared, by experience, that the more careful he was to trust in God, and to labour to please Him, the more abundantly did God provide him with all necessary things. The seraphic St. Francis of Assisi's trust in Providence was marvellous. When he sent his companions abroad on any business, for their guidance in the way he cited the verse of the Psalmist quoted above: "Cast thy care upon the Lord, and He will feed thee." When the Pope questioned him about the means of his religious brethrens' livelihood, the saint replied: "We have truly a poor Mother, but a very rich Father."

Holy Scripture abounds with examples which prove that God watches with particular care on those who trust in Him, and that He turns to

(a) Ps. liv. 23. (b) Ibid. xc. 14, 15, 16.

their profit all events, even those which are apparently contrary to their interest. In the book of Genesis, it is related that the brothers of the chaste Joseph, grievously enraged against him by reason of his dreams, which predicted his future greatness, resolved to put him to death. But being dissuaded by the arguments of Ruben, they sold him for a slave to some Ismaelite merchants. Now the very means they took to prevent the effect of his dreams were those which Providence made use of to make him lord over them and over all Egypt. So that when he discovered himself to his brothers, and they, seized with fear, knew not what to say, "Fear not," said he; "do not trouble and afflict yourselves for having sold me into this country. It is for your good that God has sent me before you into Egypt. He has sent me here for your preservation on earth, and that you may have food whereon to live. It has not happened by your counsels, but by the will of God, that I am sent here." (a) And again he says: "Can we resist the will of God? You have had a bad design against me, but God has turned it into good, to raise me to this exalted station wherein you now behold me, for the salvation of many people." (b) Who then is there that, considering this, will not have confidence in God? Who will fear the evil designs of men, and the unfortunate accidents of this world, since nothing happens which is not subject to the unchangeable order of His providence, which adjusts all things to their ends, and which turns to our good and our glory those very means the world makes use of to persecute and destroy us? "What I have determined," says our Lord

(a) Gen. xlv. 5-8. (b) Ibid. l. 19, 20.

to the Prophet Isaias, "shall remain firm and immoveable, and my will shall be executed in all things." (a) Act you as you please, nevertheless the will of God must be performed; and He will easily turn to His designs everything you do to frustrate them.

St. Chrysostom makes a beautiful reflection upon another particular fact of the life of holy Joseph. The interpretation Joseph gave of the dream of Pharaoh's cup-bearer having had its effect by the re-establishment of this officer in his former dignity, two years passed without any remembrance of Joseph, who had most earnestly desired he would be mindful of him. "But do you think," says the saint, "this forgetfulness was only an effect of chance, or a mere ingratitude of the cup-bearer? Not at all; it was an effect of the Divine disposition, which would wait a more proper season and a more favourable conjuncture to free Joseph from prison with more splendour and glory. For, supposing the cup-bearer had remembered him, he might perhaps have found means to get him out in some obscure manner, and without its being known who he was. But because God would not have him come out in that manner, and because He had resolved to elevate him with honour, He permitted the cup-bearer to forget Joseph for two whole years, so that when the time of Pharaoh's dreams had come, the king might make him come forth gloriously out of prison, to be invested with the command of all Egypt. God," adds this great saint, "is a most prudent artificer, who knows perfectly well how long the gold is to be in the fire, and when it must be taken out."

(a) Is. xlvi. 10.

In the book of Esther we have another striking confirmation of the same truth. What a chain of providential events conducted to the delivery of the Jews from the cruel and bloody sentence of King Assuerus! Vasthi must fall into disgrace, Esther be raised to the throne, and she being herself a Jewess, must undertake the patronage, and plead the cause of her nation! Mardocheus discovers the conspiracy laid by two eunuchs against the king's person. Some time after the king, not being able to sleep, calls for the annals of his reign, causes them to be read before him during the night, and wonderfully lights upon the place wherein was registered the service Mardocheus had done him. All this seems but pure accident; and nevertheless it was by the special order of Providence, which by a most hidden way, and a manner surpassing the capacity of man, disposed all these different events to save His people from the danger they were in. So when Esther declared to Mardocheus she durst not go to the king without his sending for her. "Who knows," said Mardocheus, "but thou wast raised to the throne for the help and protection of thy people on this occasion?" (a)

Blessed therefore is the man who can truly say to God, "Thou art my hope, my protector, and my refuge." For the Lord shall lead him through the right way, and shall deliver him from the snares of the enemy. "He will overshadow him with His shoulders, and under His wings shall he trust. His truth shall compass him as with a shield; he shall not be afraid of the terror of the night, of the arrow that flieth in the day, of the

(a) Esther iv. 14.

business that walketh about in the dark, of invasion, or of the noonday devil. A thousand shall fall at his side, and ten thousand at his right hand; but it shall not come nigh him. Because the Lord is his hope, and he has made the Most High his refuge, no evil shall come to him, nor shall the scourge come near his dwelling. For He hath given His angels charge over him, to keep him in all his ways; in their hands they shall bear him up, lest he dash his foot against a stone. He shall walk upon the asp and the basilisk, and he shall trample under foot the lion and the dragon."[a]

"If God be for us," says St. Paul, "who can be against us?"[b] "Let us place our trust in God," says St. Francis of Sales; "let us firmly depend on His providence, and then we shall never fear what men can say or do, for all things will turn to our advantage; even were the whole world to rise against us, nothing could happen but what pleased God, in whom we have placed our hopes." Thus acted holy David when he said, "The Lord is my strength, my refuge, and my deliverer. My God is my helper, and in Him will I put my trust; my protector and the horn of my salvation, and my support. Praising I will call upon the Lord, and I shall be saved from my enemies. The sorrows of death surrounded me, and the torrents of iniquity troubled me. The sorrows of hell encompassed me, and the snares of death prevented me. In my affliction I called upon the Lord and I cried to my God. And He heard my voice from His holy temple, and my cry before Him came into His ears."[c] "The Lord is my helper; I will not

[a] Ps. xc. 4-14. [b] Rom. viii. 31.
[c] Ps. xvii. 3-8.

fear what man can do unto me. The Lord is my helper; I will look over my enemies. It is good to confide in the Lord, rather than to have confidence in man. It is good to trust in the Lord, rather than to trust in princes." (a)

FOURTEENTH DAY.

"They that hope in the Lord shall renew their strength, they shall take wings as eagles, they shall run and not be weary, they shall walk and not faint." (b)—*The Prophet Isaias.*

"When anyone places his whole trust in God, hoping in and serving Him faithfully at the same time, God watches over him to the extent of his confidence in every danger. Infinite is the love which God bears to souls who repose in His protection."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"THE Lord ruleth me," says holy David, "and I shall want nothing. He hath set me in a place of pasture. He has brought me up on the water of refreshment. He hath converted my soul. He hath led me on the paths of justice, for His own name's sake. For though I should walk in the midst of the shadow of death I fear no evils, for Thou art with me."(c)

"I shall not be ashamed because I have hoped in Thee."(d) "I have put my trust in the Lord, and shall not be weakened."(e) "I am poor and destitute of all things, but the Lord is careful for

(a) Ps. cxvii. 6—9.
(b) Is. lx. 31.
(c) Ps. xxii. 1—4.
(d) Ibid. xxiv. 20.
(e) Ibid. xxv. 1.

me."(a) "Why art thou sad, O my soul? and why dost thou trouble me? Hope in God, for I will still give praise to Him, the salvation of my countenance and my God." (b) "In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped, let me never be confounded; deliver me in Thy justice. Bow down Thy ear to me, make haste to deliver me. Be Thou unto me a God, a protector, and a house of refuge to save me; for Thou art my strength and my refuge, and for Thy name's sake Thou wilt lead me, and nourish me."(c)

"Oh, Lord of my soul!" exclaims St. Theresa, "who can in words explain what Thou grantest to those who confide in Thee; and what, on the contrary, is lost by those who, though they have been uplifted in raptures and ecstacies, still trust in themselves?"

"That child will never perish," writes St. Francis of Sales, "who remains in the arms of a Father who is Almighty. If our God grants us not always that which we ask of Him, it is to keep us near Him, and to give us occasion to urge Him, and to constrain Him with a loving violence, even as He made it apparent at Emmaus to the two disciples, with whom he stayed not till they constrained Him. For the rest He is gracious and kind; the moment that we humble ourselves under His will He accommodates Himself to ours. Try, then, to fortify more and more your confidence in this holy Providence, and frequently adore it, especially by interior recollection and aspirations.

"Give into the hands of God's most secret Providence whatever you may find painful to you,

(a) Ps. xxxix. 18. (b) Ibid. xli. 6.
(c) Ibid. xxx. 2—4.

and firmly believe that He will sweetly conduct you, your life, and all your affairs. Do you know what the shepherds in Arabia do when they see the sky lightened, and the air charged with sulphureous vapour? They retire under the laurel-trees, they and their flocks. When we see that persecutions or contradictions threaten us with some great trouble, we must retire, we and our affections, under the holy Cross, with a true confidence that all will end to the advantage of those who love God. Keep your heart, then, calm and settled; be much on your guard against eagerness; often cast your confidence on the Providence of our Lord, and be altogether sure that heaven and earth shall sooner pass away than the Lord be wanting to your protection, so long as you are His obedient child, or at least desirous to obey Him. And if you do not feel this confidence, you are not to refrain from making acts of it, and from saying to our Lord: 'Though, my Lord, I have no feeling of confidence in Thee, I know, however, that Thou art my God, that I am entirely Thine, and that I cannot hope but in Thy bounty; thus I abandon myself into Thy hands.' It is always in your power to make such acts as these, and though we feel a difficulty, there is by no means an impossibility; and it is on these occasions, and amidst these difficulties, that we are to prove our fidelity to our Lord. For though we make these acts without feeling, and without any satisfaction, we are not to be uneasy on that account, since our Lord will be better pleased with our conduct. And tell me not that you repeat them with your lips only; for if the heart were unwilling, the mouth would not utter a word. Having done this, remain in peace, and without attending to your

trouble speak to our Lord on some other subject."

It was thus that the saints acted, especially in the time of their greatest trials. Of the blessed Valfrè it is related that he was struck with a profound dread of the divine judgments, the consideration of which sometimes filled him with the most pungent sufferings. "I have felt in my interior," thus he explains himself, "an anguish that has pierced my soul. This originated in an obscurity of mind in which I could find no relief; it seemed to me that my salvation was lost irrecoverably, nor could I find any means of issuing from this obscurity. I would have given a whole world to have a little light through which I might know what I must do to accomplish the will of God; nor did I know with whom to advise, crosses of this nature not being so easily understood by him who has not experienced them. I was inwardly convulsed through fear of damning myself; but I nevertheless turned to the divine mercy, protesting that even had I been able to know with certainty I was abandoned by God, I would still have hoped in Him." In the combat described is seen not only his internal martyrdom, but his generous confidence also. He sighed, he groaned; but in the very time in which he said he was as if abandoned by God, he declared that he would hope for relief and aid from God alone; and to Him he at once had recourse, and in Him he found spiritual comfort.

St. Rose acted in the same manner. She took great pleasure in meditating upon and pronouncing these words of the Prophet David: "Incline unto my aid, O God! O, Lord, make haste to help me!" She had them almost constantly in her

mouth and in her heart. Once she was attacked with a great fear regarding the inscrutable mystery of predestination, but God did not leave her long in this anxiety. He spoke these words of consolation in the interior of her soul: "My child, know that I only condemn those who, by resisting my graces, will obstinately lose their souls; continue, therefore, to make a good use of them; live in peace, and be no longer disturbed with this fear." This favourable answer from her divine spouse greatly increased her confidence in Him, and she firmly continued in it to the last.

The venerable Benedict Labré, on being asked by his director: "How can man, who is a vile worm, aspire to so great a good as Paradise, and hope for it from God?" answered, all inflamed with love, "That God is so good and so merciful, that to obtain Heaven it is sufficient to ask it of Him from our hearts." Again, on being asked what he would do or say to an angel who should bring him the dreadful news that his name was not written in the book of life or had been blotted out, he replied: "I would not on that account cease to do good; on the contrary, I would try to do more; I would not despair; on the contrary, I would strive to increase my hope, firmly believing that the salvation of my soul cannot be refused by the Son of God, who suffered so much and died for me." On another occasion, being questioned by a person who greatly admired his virtue, how he would be able to continue to the end the austere method of life he had commenced; he replied, that he put his whole trust in God, and that he felt confident that God would give him the necessary help to crush the serpent's head even to the last.

FIFTEENTH DAY.

"Although He should kill me, I will trust in Him." (a)—*Holy Job.*

"God is certainly more desirous of our best welfare than we are ourselves; and He knows the ways and means of promoting it better than we, for they are in His hands as Ruler of the universe; wherefore, in all the accidents which befall us, most certainly that happens which is best."—*St. Augustine.*

Holy David, considering God's wonderful condescension to man, addresses Him thus: "What is man that Thou art mindful of him? or the son of man that thou visitest him?"(b) These words ought to inspire us with the greatest confidence in God. "You ought, indeed," says St. Liguori, "to reverence God with all humility, and to abase yourself before Him, particularly at the remembrance of your ingratitude, and the outrages which you have committed against Him; but this ought not to hinder you from treating with Him with the greatest possible love and confidence. He is infinite Majesty; but at the same time He is infinite bounty and infinite love. You have in God the highest Lord, but you have in Him also the greatest lover. He does not look down upon you with disdain; but is pleased when you treat with Him with the same confidence, freedom, and love as children treat with their parents. Hear how He invites us to present ourselves at His feet, and the caresses which he promises us: 'You shall be carried at the breasts, and upon the knees they shall caress you. As one whom the mother

(a) Job xiii. 15. (b) Ps. viii. 5.

caresseth, so will I comfort you.'(a) As a mother delights in taking her child upon her knees in caressing and feeding him, so does our God delight in treating with love and tenderness those souls who give themselves entirely to Him, and place all their hopes in His goodness and bounty."

Deeply impressed with these truths, the saints placed no limits to their confidence in God, and to their hope of salvation: "I purpose," says blessed Leonard, in one of his resolutions, "to practise the virtue of hope with as much confidence as if I were secure of my salvation and was already in Paradise. I will found my hope, and will look for grace and glory from the justice, the faithfulness, the mercy, and the omnipotence of God. For He is able, is willing, and has promised to save us, giving us, as our ransom, His Son Jesus Christ, by Whose grace I hope to live holily, and be saved." To make his hope more firm and steadfast, he endeavoured to conceive so great an idea of the mercy of God, that relying on the infinite merits of Jesus Christ, he hoped that he might be saved without going to Purgatory, although he was disposed to accept the pains and sufferings of that place willingly and thankfully if such was the will of God. "And this hope," he added, "cannot be injurious or presumptuous; but may be profitable, because it does not exclude a holy filial fear springing from the majesty of God, and will make me more diligent, since for this end I propose to avoid not only mortal, but also venial sin, and the least imperfection." He frequently used the ejaculation, "Jesus, my mercy!" to obtain all graces, and particularly that of persevering to the

(a) Is. lxvi. 12, 13.

end in the love of God. The hope he had of being saved never left him, and he not only consoled himself with full confidence in the divine mercy, but encouraged others never to depair, but to believe that, notwithstanding their imperfections and venial sins, Almighty God, who remembers their weaknesses, would be merciful to them. He exhorted them to bear in mind the merits of Jesus Christ, and the sacrifice He made for our sins, the intercession of the saints, who pray for us, the indulgences to be gained, and other similar things, which may lead us to the hope of gaining Paradise. Once being asked if he hoped to go to Heaven without passing through Purgatory, he said: "Yes, I hope to be made worthy to do so; if I try not to fall into mortal or deliberate venial sin, God will mercifully accept the works and hardships which I perform for His glory to merit in some measure His divine mercy." Frequently when he was speaking with his brothers in religion he would fix his gaze on heaven, full of trust and confidence in God, and exclaim: "Ah! when shall I see death, when shall these bonds which bind me to earth be broken? When will that happy day come when I shall behold my God?" In hearing confessions, in preaching, and on all occasions, he encouraged every one not to lose hope, but however grievous their sins might be, to hope in God, and feel secure that with His gracious mercy and assistance they would attain eternal salvation.

We read the same of the venerable Fabrizio dall'Aste. At the close of his life, the nearer he felt himself to his inheritance the more ardent became his hope of possessing it. On being visited by one of his spiritual children, he said to him:

"My son, the judgments of God are great, and to be feared; but I hope in the divine mercy and in the Passion of Jesus Christ."

The venerable Mariano Sozzini greatly delighted in looking up to heaven, and when indulging his devotion he would go up to some high open place, and whilst standing there in the contemplation of heaven would refresh himself with the lively hope of having it in his possession. Whilst staying at Frascati to recruit himself after a grievous illness, a few months before his death, being unable to leave the house in consequence of a disease in his leg, he spent much of his time in a little balcony, from whence, being able to see the country as well as the sky, he was greatly comforted in his spirit, and said to his companion: "Oh, what a lovely prospect! how it pleases me, because I seem to behold in it a trace of the immense greatness of God, and begin to taste here a sample of what is there; and though it be distant, Oh, how it consoles me!"

A holy abbot of the desert gave the following instruction to his religious brethren: "The devils make it their business, when they have drawn a soul into sin, to strive to cast her headlong into dejection and despair, that so they may complete her ruin. They are always plotting against the poor soul, and saying: '*When shall she die*, and *her name perish?*' but let the faithful soul reply with confidence in God: 'I shall not die, but live and declare the words of the Lord.' And if they should say to her again: '*Get thee away from hence to the mountain like a sparrow;*' let her reply: 'Behold my God and my Saviour; He is my protector, I will not go hence.'"

SIXTEENTH DAY.

"I can do all things in Him who strengtheneth me." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Do for God what thou canst, and God will do for thee what thou canst not. Be faithful in little things, and God will help thee to accomplish great ones."—*Venerable Da Ponte.*

St. Francis of Sales thus encourages the Christian soul: "Keep your eyes lifted up to God, augment your courage in holy humility, fortify it in sweetness, confirm it in evenness. Make your spirit perpetually the master of your inclinations and humours. Never allow vain apprehensions to enter into your heart. Each day will give you the knowledge of what you shall best do the next. You have ere now got over many a difficulty, and that was by the grace of God; the same grace will be present to you on all future occasions, and will deliver you from one difficulty after another; yea, though it were necessary for Him to send an angel to help you over the most dangerous steps. Turn not your eyes towards your infirmities and insufficiency, except it be to humble yourself, never to discourage. Often see God at your right hand, and the good angel whom He has destined for you."

Father Scupoli, in his Spiritual Combat, urges the same thing, in the following words: "Let every one be fully persuaded that neither all possible qualifications, whether natural or acquired, nor all supernatural gifts, nor perfect knowledge of

(a) Philip. iv. 13.

the Scriptures, nor even whole ages spent in the service of the Creator, can enable man to do the will of God, and comply with his duty, unless the hand of the Almighty support him as often as any good action is to be done, any temptation to be overcome, any danger to be avoided, or cross to be taken up, which Providence shall please to ordain. Let all, therefore, place this truth before their eyes every day, hour, and moment of their lives, that they may be ever mindful of it, and thus banish all presumption, never rashly daring to confide in themselves.

"But in order to acquire an entire confidence in God we must firmly believe that He is equally able to subdue all enemies, whether many or few, strong or weak, experienced or inexperienced. Consequently, though a soul should be overwhelmed by sins, though she were subject to all the defects imaginable; though she should have laboured in vain to disengage herself from vice, and follow virtue; though she should even find her propensity to evil increase daily, instead of her advancing in virtue; yet she must not fail to place her confidence in God, she must not be discouraged, nor abandon her spiritual works; on the contrary, she ought to excite herself to new fervour, and redouble her efforts against the enemy.

"In this combat the victory is sure to attend him who has the courage not to throw down his arms, or lay aside his confidence in God; for His assistance is never wanting to such as fight, though He may sometimes permit them to be wounded. Persevere, therefore, to the end; on this the victory depends. As to the rest, he who fights for God's cause, who places his entire trust in Him, finds a speedy and efficacious remedy for the wounds he

receives, and sees his enemies at his feet when he least expects them."

Be our trials, and difficulties, and miseries, then, what they may, we must never relax in our confidence in God, but rather take care to increase it. St. Liguori gives the following advice to persons who are labouring under afflictions and tribulations: "Whenever you are afflicted with infirmity, temptation, persecution, or any other trial, betake yourself immediately to God, and implore His assistance. It will be sufficient for you to represent to Him what it is that afflicts you, saying, 'Behold, O Lord, for I am in distress,'(a) and He will not delay to console you, or at least to give you strength to bear your trial with patience; which will be of more advantage to you than if He should deliver you from it. Make known to Him all the thoughts which torment you, whether of fear or sadness, or any other evil inclination, and say to Him: 'In thee, O God, are all my hopes; I offer this tribulation to Thee, and I resign myself to Thy will; take pity on me; either deliver me from it or give me strength to support it.' And He will immediately be mindful of the promise which He has recorded in His Gospel, of consoling and comforting all those who in tribulation have recourse to Him: 'Come to me all you that labour and are burdened, and I will refresh you.' (b)

"He is not offended when, labouring under afflictions, you seek comfort from your friends; but He would have you have recourse principally to Him. At least, therefore, when you have had recourse to creatures, and they have not been able to console

(a) Lam. i. 20. (b) Matt. xi. 28.

your heart, go to your Creator and say to Him: 'Lord, men have only words; they cannot afford me consolation, nor do I any more desire to be consoled by them; Thou alone art my only hope, Thou alone my only love; by Thee alone do I desire to be comforted; and may my consolation be, to do on this occasion what will be most pleasing to Thee. Behold, I am ready to endure this trial for the whole of my life, if such should be Thy will; but do Thou assist me.'

"Do not be afraid lest He should be offended, if you should sometimes sweetly complain to Him, saying, 'Why, O Lord, hast Thou retired afar off?'(a) 'Lord, Thou knowest that I love Thee, and that I desire nothing but Thy love; have pity on me and help me; do not abandon me.' When desolation continues for a long time, and grievously afflicts you, unite your voice with that of your afflicted and dying Jesus on the Cross, and, imploring His pity, say to Him: 'My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?'(b) Let the thought that, having offended God, you do not deserve His consolations, serve to humble you the more, and let the conviction that God causes or permits all that happens for your good, animate you to greater confidence in Him. When you are more than usually troubled and disconsolate, say to Him, courageously: 'The Lord is my light and my salvation, whom shall I fear?'(c) Thou, O Lord, wilt enlighten and save me; in Thee do I confide. 'In Thee, O Lord, have I hoped; let me never be confounded.'(d) 'And thus be pacified, knowing that no one who has hoped in

(a) Ps. ix. i.
(b) Matt. xxvii. 46.
(c) Ps. xxvi. 1.
(d) Ibid. xxx. 1.

Him has been confounded.'(a) Reflect that your God loves you more than you can love yourself. Of what are you afraid? Console yourself with David, saying, 'The Lord is careful for me.'(b) Say to Him, I cast myself into Thy arms, O Lord; and I desire to think only of loving and pleasing Thee. Behold, I am ready to do whatever Thou requirest of me. Thou art not only desirous but solicitous for my good; to Thee, therefore, do I commit my salvation. In Thee do I rest, and will ever rest, since Thou desirest that I should place all my hope in Thee."

SEVENTEENTH DAY.

"Why are ye fearful, O ye of little faith?" (c)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

"When we have once placed ourselves entirely into the hands of God, we need apprehend no evil; if adversity comes, He knows how to turn it to our advantage, by means which will in time be manifested to us."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

THIS proposition is exemplified by the following anecdotes. In his youth, St. Francis of Sales visited Rome, and returning one evening to the inn where he lodged, on the banks of the Tiber, found his servants quarrelling with the landlord, who was insisting upon their changing their quarters, as he wished to let their apartments to more

(a) Eccl. ii. 11. (b) Ps. xxxix. 18.
(c) Matt. viii. 26.

profitable guests, who had just arrived. Hearing the cause of their dispute, Francis meekly told his servants to go and seek another lodging; but they had no sooner removed than the Tiber, swollen by heavy rains, overflowed its banks, and so great was the violence of the waters, that the inn from which Francis was ejected was thrown down, and all its inmates perished.

A similar providence guarded and avenged St. Ignatius of Loyola. Returning from his pilgrimage to the Holy Land, and reaching Cyprus, he found three vessels on the point of sailing for Italy. The first was Turkish, the second a large, strong, and well-armed Venetian ship, and the third a small, time-worn bark, almost unfit for sea. Some friends of the saint asked the Venetian captain to give him a passage for the love of God; but on hearing that Ignatius was penniless, the captain refused, observing that if this poor man were a saint, he might walk over the water, as many saints had already done. At length St. Ignatius was obliged to go on board the old rickety vessel, where he was very charitably received. The three ships set sail on the same day, with a prosperous wind, but towards night a furious storm arose, and ere the tempest abated the Turkish ship foundered, the Venetian vessel was stranded on a sand-bank, and with difficulty saved its cargo, whilst the old ship safely reached its port.

When the army of St. Venceslaus, king of Bohemia, was defeated, and the king himself made a prisoner, he was asked how he felt. On which he answered that he was in as good spirits as ever; because, when well provided with human aid time failed him to think of God, but now that he was,

humanly speaking, helpless, he should place all his hopes in God, without fear of being confounded.

St. Vincent of Paul, on hearing that powerful personages were intriguing to destroy his congregation, wrote to a friend, saying, "Let us rely, without reserve, on Providence, contrary to which nothing happens, and let us banish useless fears."

When the blessed Paul of the Cross saw his congregation in any danger or difficulty, he used to say, "It is on account of my sins that we do not prosper; but," he would add, with great animation and confidence, "Take courage, we shall see; I know very well what will become of the congregation; my sins alone hinder its progress; still it is the work of God, and must make its way in time."

Looking mournfully upon the crucifix, he said he had never done anything well, that he had spoiled every good work, that he was a sinner and deserved hell, and yet when he thought of the love and goodness of Jesus, he was filled with consolation, and threw himself entirely into His merciful arms.

When the venerable Father Segneri published his work on Concord, against the errors of the false Quietists, many anonymous letters were sent to him, filled with infamous accusations and cruel threats; so much so, that not to expose himself to their insulting persecution, many entreated him not to set out that year on the mission; but the holy father, always animated by the same spirit, ever relying upon the protection of his Lord, cast aside every shadow of fear, and constantly repeated his usual maxim, that being engaged in the cause of God, it was for God to defend it. However, if He should not be pleased to do so, he protested that he would be most happy, for love of Him, to

shed his blood and to lay down his life; and he often affectionately addressed God in those words which St. Bernard used in similar circumstances: "Bonum mihi si me digneris uti pro clypeo." Nor was his confidence in God less remarkable when his book was prohibited in Rome. He did not make the least complaint, nor did he show the slightest mark of discouragement; he even consoled his friends, who were condoling with him, and ceased not to repeat that saying of his, that he wrote in the cause of God, and that God would protect it. And such was the event; for the truth was brought by degrees more openly to light, and the serpent which lay concealed among the flowers was discovered; the errors against which he wrote were condemned by the sacred tribunal of the Inquisition, and his work was restored to the public, to the great glory of the author.

The blessed Ippolito is said, through his great confidence in God, to have always evinced an unvaried cheerfulness of countenance as well as of heart, in the midst of his most bitter trials; the more severe and heavy were his crosses, the more happy did he appear. When any one condoled with him under his afflictions, he generally answered, "Fear not; we have an everlasting Provider, who watches to protect us. My dear Jesus has always been prompt to succour me, and I rest my whole confidence in Him."

These and other similar examples show plainly the truth of that sentence of St. Ambrose, who says, "When we find ourselves in some danger, we must not lose courage, but confide much in the Lord; for where danger is great, great also is the assistance of Him who is called our Helper in tribulation."

EIGHTEENTH DAY.

"In undertaking an affair for God's service, after imploring light from on high, and ascertaining the Divine will, though human means are not to be neglected, we must rely solely on Divine aid for success, being well persuaded that whatever happens will be for the best."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

"He who serves God with a pure heart, laying aside all human interests and seeking only the Divine honour, may hope to succeed in his affairs, even when to others they seem desperate, since the operations of God are beyond the ken of mortal vision, and depend on a loftier than human policy."—*St. Charles Borromeus.*

THIS saintly cardinal used, by prayer, to have recourse to God in all his affairs. Even when the case seemed hopeless, still he persevered. Hence he succeeded in great undertakings, which at first seemed to some impossible.

When King Josaphat was surrounded by enemies, addressing his own immediate attendants, he said: "As we cannot resist such a multitude, let us raise our eyes to God, and all will be well;" and so it happened.

A certain person recommending himself to the prayers of St. Vincent of Paul, the Saint answered: "The whole of the morning has been occupied in business, so that I have prayed but little and distractedly; hence judge what you will gain by my prayers. However, this does not discourage me, for I trust in God, and not in my preparations and cares, being certain that the throne of God's mercy is raised upon the foundation of our miseries."

St. Ignatius of Loyola set about his affairs as if success depended upon his exertions; but in the

mean time God was his only hope. Father Alvarez being rector of a poor college, the minister often anxiously came to complain. The rector inquired whether he had recommended his needs to God. The minister answering that he had no time to pray, the superior said: "Prayer is the first thing to be attended to; retire to your chamber and make your petition briefly to the Lord. Do you think the shepherd will not take care of his flock? Go in peace, and be without solicitude." The minister faithfully complied with this advice, and often found his wants supplied in a wondrous way.

It was said of St. Francis of Sales, by the holy Mother of Chantal, that he was the most resolute person she ever knew in continuing any work which he had once undertaken. Whenever there was a question of God's honour, he was not deterred by dangers or difficulties, but hastened with an undaunted courage wherever he was called.

Sometimes the success of his undertaking did not correspond with his expectations; but even then he would never yield to despondency, but was always calm and content, because he placed a full confidence in God, who directs all things to the advantage of those who fulfil His holy will. Fully resigned to that, he preserved a holy cheerfulness, and nothing was capable of disturbing the peace of his heart, which was an unequivocal proof that the love of God reigned there sovereignly, and that he could say, with St. Paul, "I no longer live, but Jesus Christ liveth in me."

NINETEENTH DAY.

"Let us not suppose that, whilst we live in this world, we can avoid all imperfections; for this is not possible, whether our stations be high or low: we are all frail mortals, and consequently must not be surprised to find ourselves subject to imperfections. Our Lord has ordered us to repeat daily these words in the '*Our Father*:' '*Forgive us our trespasses as we forgive them that trespass against us;*' and there is no exception to this injunction, as we all stand in need of the salutary order. It is not a proof of particular weakness to fall occasionally into venial sins, provided we recover ourselves by an instantaneous return to God, accompanied with calm and humility. We can never expect to live without committing occasional faults of this description: our Blessed Lady only was exempted from them by a special privilege. Assuredly they impede us in some degree on our road, but they do not divert us from our journey; to turn our eyes towards our God is sufficient to efface them." —*St. Francis of Sales.*

"When a man falls into some venial sins and imperfections, he must not give way to impatience or despondency, even though he were in one day to relapse a thousand times. Human frailty is well known to God, who is moved to compassion rather than to anger by the relapsing sinner who humbly acknowledges and grieves for his faults. Let him strive once more to advance on the road of perfection; and were he to die in the endeavour, happy and enviable would be his lot.

"Know that thy offences are more efficaciously cancelled by humbly acknowledging them with loving confidence before God, than by sadly and morosely revolving them in thy mind.

"When through frailty thou fallest into sin, be not dispirited overmuch; but after acknowledging thy error, believe that Jesus is more ready to pardon thy fault than thou art willing humbly to ask forgiveness thereof. At times God alloweth some blameworthy imperfections, such as a proneness to irritability, ill-humour, &c., to remain in His devout servants, that they may be humbled and mortified in themselves and before others; for Divine love, like fire under ashes, is thus the better preserved."—*Venerable Blosius.*

All the saints and spiritual masters agree in teaching the same lesson. "The presumptuous

man," writes Father Scupoli, "is persuaded he has acquired a diffidence of himself and a confidence in God; but the mistake is plainly discovered when he commits some fault. For if he then gives way to dejection and despair of advancing in the way of virtue, it is evident he places his confidence in himself, and not in God; and the greater his anxiety and despondency, the greater the certainty of his guilt.

"He who mistrusts himself, and places great confidence in God, if he commit a fault, is not at all surprised; he does not abandon himself to a perplexing vexation; he justly attributes what has happened to his own weakness and a want of due confidence in God. Hence he learns to distrust himself still more, and to place all his hopes in the assistance of the Almighty. He detests beyond all things the sin he has fallen into, he condemns that passion or criminal habit which occasioned his fall, he conceives a lively sorrow for having offended his God; but his sorrow, ever attended with peace of mind, does not interrupt the method he has laid down, or prevent his pursuing his enemies to their final destruction."

Blessed Paul of the Cross gave this advice to his religious: "Whenever you find yourselves inclined to diffidence, lift up your hearts lovingly to God, and be assured that your defects are, in the sight of His infinite goodness, but as a few threads of tow cast into a sea of fire. Figure to yourselves a burning furnace, as vast as the hemisphere we inhabit; if a piece of tow were thrown into it, would it not be so absorbed in the fire as instantly to disappear? Our God is a consuming fire, as it is written—'*Deus noster ignis consumens est*,' and our imperfections, compared with His goodness, are

what a piece of tow is to the furnace. When, therefore, we have fallen, let us humble ourselves sorrowfully in His presence, and then, with an act of unbounded confidence, let us throw ourselves into the ocean of His goodness, where every failing will be cancelled, and anxiety will be turned into love."

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque wrote thus to a devout person: "Keep yourself in the sacred heart of Jesus as in a strong fort; you will there find the strength to enable you to be neither cast down nor troubled at anything, not even your own defects. When we see our faults, instead of being discouraged, we should humble ourselves, being glad that they are known to us, and appear such as they are. This practice will keep your soul in peace, and will make your heart the throne of God, who delights in the humble of spirit. Be well pleased that He sends you occasions of suffering, whether in regard to your neighbour or within yourself; receive them as a pledge of His love, which endeavours by such means to render your heart conformable to His."

Of the venerable Father Da Ponte, it is said that his miseries and imperfections only served to increase his confidence and strengthen his hope, being persuaded that God could not refuse him what he asked only for the sake of His own glory, whilst he abandoned himself entirely to His mercy, acknowledging himself to have no merit of His own. On one occasion he wrote thus: "I had been much afflicted for several days on account of my sins and passions, when our Lord imparted to me a strong feeling of His infinite mercy, so much greater than all my miseries, weaknesses, and imperfections, that these were completely submerged

in it. This light left me much encouraged, and emboldened my confidence to ask and expect everything from God, relying solely on His mercy and on the merits of His Son." With still greater energy he thus expresses himself elsewhere: "Being one day discouraged when asking great things of God, because I saw myself so miserable, I was suddenly struck with these words of the royal prophet: 'My soul hath fainted after Thy salvation, and in Thy word I have hoped exceeding much.' (a) Reflecting on these words, it occurred to me that I may hope for greater things from God than these (which, considering my weakness, I could not venture to ask), so long as my confidence rests on the infinite mercy of God, and the infinite merits of His Son; and thus it is I understand the expression '*hoped* exceeding much.' Hence I may hope for an intimate union and a familiar intercourse with His Divine Majesty, and other similar gifts, notwithstanding my own demerits. With this feeling I took great courage to ask for everything without the slightest fear, because, if I truly hope in Him, and have recourse to His mercy, all my sins and miseries are but as an atom, which cannot hinder the light of the sun; neither could I find any cause of vain glory if our Lord should hear my petitions, and even grant me more than I ask, because all springs from His liberality and mercy, and I am altogether unworthy of it. With this reflection, then, I ventured to say to God: 'Create a clean heart in me, O God! an humble heart, a meek heart, an obedient heart, a temperate heart; seeing that he who creates, creates out of nothing, and has no need of any foregoing merits or disposi-

(a) Ps. cxviii. 81.

tions in the subject.'" With these heroic sentiments of confidence in the mercy of God, and in the merits of Jesus Christ, it is no wonder that he acquired such a composure of soul, that no event, either prosperous or adverse, could disturb the peace of his heart or ruffle the serenity of his brow.

Some persons cannot understand how the consciousness of our own misery may be reconciled with a perfect confidence in God. To such persons St. Francis of Sales answers as follows: "You ask whether a soul, having the consciousness of her misery, can go to God with a great confidence. Now I reply, that not only the soul which has the consciousness of her misery can have a great confidence in God, but that she cannot have a true confidence unless she has the knowledge of her misery; for this knowledge and this admission of our misery introduces us to God.

"Therefore all the great saints, such as Job, David, and others, began all their prayers with the confession of their misery; so that a right good thing it is to be conscious that one is poor, vile, abject, and unworthy to appear before God. That proverb, so famous amongst the ancients, 'Know thyself,' at the same time that it applies to the greatness and excellence of the soul, that we should not abuse and profane it by things unworthy of its nobility, also applies to the knowledge of our own unworthiness, imperfection, and misery, that the more we feel ourselves to be miserable, the more we should trust in the mercy and goodness of God; for between His mercy and our misery there is a bond so close, that the one cannot exercise itself without the other. If God had not created man, He still would have been all good; but He would not have been actually merci-

ful, because mercy is only exercised towards the miserable. You see, then, that the more we feel ourselves miserable, the more we have occasion to put our trust in God, since we have no ground to put our trust in ourselves.

"Mistrust in ourselves arises from the knowledge of our imperfections. It is good to mistrust ourselves; but how would it advantage us to do so, if it did not induce us to throw all our confidence in God, and to wait on His mercy? The faults and unfaithfulness which we daily commit, ought to bring much confusion upon us when we would approach our Lord. Thus we read that great souls, like St. Catherine of Sienna and St. Teresa, had these great confusions when they had fallen into some fault; and it is very reasonable, that having offended God, we should retire awhile in humility, and remain confused. The same thing often happens to us when we have offended a friend; we are ashamed to approach him. But we must not stop there; for it would be no great thing to debase and annihilate ourselves by acts of confusion, if we do not throw ourselves wholly on God by confidence."

TWENTIETH DAY.

"God is faithful, who will not suffer you to be tempted above that which you are able: but will make also with temptation issue, that you may be able to bear it." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"The Lord knoweth how to deliver the godly from temptation." (b) *The Apostle St. Peter.*

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque thus wrote to a person who, being much troubled by temptation, was in danger of losing her confidence in God:—"Be comforted, my dear sister, and fight generously, for I hope the sovereign Pastor will not lose His beloved sheep. He only permits the infernal wolf to attack us, that He may have a reason for rewarding us, and may bestow Himself as the price of our victories. Thus we ought never to be discouraged, nor permit ourselves to be disquieted; if we are humble, these troubles will raise us as much in the sight of God as they abase us in our own eyes. If you are alone, embrace the crucifix; if not, press the cross upon your breast, and say, 'O my Saviour, I disavow with all my heart whatever passes within me contrary to Thy holy love; I cheerfully accept all the painful dispositions in which it shall be Thy pleasure to place me. I love and cherish my cross for the love of Him Who has given it to me, and I desire only the accomplishment of Thy holy will. Whenever

(a) 1 Cor. x. 13. (b) 2 Peter ii. 9.

I kiss Thy cross, it is to show that I submit to mine.'"

"Aware of human weakness," writes Venerable Blosius, "and in order that they may be able to resist the stormy blasts of sin, God tempers for His elect the winds and waves of temptation. Between them and danger, when the peril is imminent, He interposes Himself; not unlike a watchful mother, who with outstretched hand checks her heedless child from running towards a precipice, or to the blaze of the scorching fire."

And again: "Thy heavenly Father, it is true, permitteth thee to be tempted; but it is only to test thy fidelity and love, and to render thee compassionate towards thy neighbour's failings. He thus wieldeth the scourge of salutary correction to chasten thy heart before imparting His grace. At times He may appear to have abandoned thee to a reprobate sense; but it is solely for the purpose of humiliating and correcting thy self-sufficiency and pride.

"In conflicts with Satan, thy arch-enemy, though thou mayest have been by temptation a thousand times overthrown, and have received as many ghastly wounds, still do not throw down thy arms, or fly from the field of battle. After rallying to the best of thy power, perseveringly trust in God, and thou wilt gain in the end a victor's crown."

St. Francis of Sales thus encourages those fearful souls who, aware of their own weakness, are excessively apprehensive lest they should yield to the attack of temptation:—"It has frequently happened," says he, "that persons who, in the midst of consolation, promised themselves that they would do marvels for God, have failed when put to the trial; and others again, who greatly mistrusted

their own strength, and feared much that they would fail when put to the proof, have on a sudden effected marvels, because that deep feeling of their own weakness drove them to seek aid and succour from God, to watch, to pray, and to humble themselves, that they might not enter into temptation.

" I further say that we ought in nowise to be distressed at not feeling within us force or courage to resist temptation, in the supposition of its occurrence at the present moment, if only we desire to resist it, hoping that, if it did come, God would help us. For there is no need for us always to have the sensation of strength and courage; it is enough for us to hope and desire to have it at the right time and place, nor is there any need for us to feel within ourselves any sign or mark that we shall have that courage; it is sufficient for us to hope that God will aid us.

" Sampson, who was called the strong man, never felt the supernatural strength with which God assisted him except on the occasions for its exercise; and on that account it is said, when encountering lions or his enemies, that the spirit of God came upon him.([a]) God, who does nothing in vain, does not give you either strength or courage when there is no occasion for it, but only when you stand in need of it; and so we must always hope that in time of need He will aid us, provided we ask His assistance. We should constantly use those words of David: ' Why art thou sad, O my soul? And why dost thou disquiet me? Hope in God.'([b]) And again: ' When my strength shall fail, do not Thou forsake me.'([c]) Well then,

([a]) Judges xiv. 6. ([b]) Ps. xlii. 5.
([c]) Id. lxx. 9.

since you desire to depend entirely on God, why do you fear your weakness, on which it is very true that you ought to place no kind of reliance? Do you not hope in God? And shall he that hopeth in Him ever be confounded? No, he never shall be."

In the time of temptation, instead of yielding to useless anxiety and giving way to despondency, let us have instant recourse to God in prayer, and with few but earnest words entreat of Him to come to our help. As soon as we feel ourselves attacked by the flames of concupiscence, let us raise our mind, heart, and voice to God, and say to Him in perfect confidence, "Aid me, O Lord; help me, that I may not offend Thee."

Do not be disturbed if the temptation should return again and again to molest you, because, if you do not take pleasure in it, if it gives you pain and sorrow, if you are grieved at being attacked by it, you need not be uneasy about it; for this is a sign that the temptation has not reached your heart. And if it still continue to disturb your peace, you must not afflict yourself, because as long as it gives you uneasiness, you may be sure that you have not given full consent to it. St. Francis of Sales says: "If the devil is knocking at the door of your heart, it is a sign that he has not obtained admission." The enemy does not bring an army to attack a fortress which is already in his hands. If the battle continues, so does the resistance. Never confound the feeling with the consent, the imagination with the will, the knowledge of the temptation with the acquiescence in it.

If you suffer a great rebellion in your inferior appetite without the consent of the superior will, instead of committing sin, you acquire great merit.

If you cannot discover whether you have consented or not to a temptation, discover all with simplicity to your Director; and if he tells you that you have not done so, believe him firmly, and chase away every fear that he may not have understood you, or that you have not properly explained your state to him. In all temptations against faith or purity, it is better not to attempt to subdue them by acts contrary to them, because such acts easily excite the imagination through the phantoms which are presented to the mind; but conquer them by making acts of sorrow, of confidence, and of love, calling on the names of Jesus and Mary, and renewing your resolutions to die rather than sin; and thus the current of your thoughts will be changed: but if these temptations should continue, do not be unhappy about them, for they will increase your crown. Only be firm in fighting against the temptation and the tempter.

TWENTY-FIRST DAY.

"They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, he shall not be moved for ever that dwelleth in Jerusalem." (a)—*Holy David.*

"A servant of God should fear nothing, not even Satan, who is soon discomfited when made little account of. If the Lord be mighty, the demons are but His bondslaves; what evil therefore can they do to the servants of so great a king?"—*St. Teresa.*

This saint was naturally so timid, that she did not like being left alone even in the daytime; but considering how silly it was to be afraid of anything but of offending God Almighty, whom she wished to serve and please, she at length asked herself, "What is it I fear?" and then taking a cross, she defied the demons of hell, saying, "Let me see what you are able to do against a servant of the Lord." After this all her fears vanished; so that when she saw the infernal spirits, which she did often, she felt no longer alarmed, nay, it seemed that they were afraid of her, and she dreaded them no more than so many flies.

No sooner had St. Anthony retired into the desert, and there devoted himself with great fervour to a life of holiness, than the devil, enraged to see so much ardour for the attainment of virtue in a person so young, employed all his arts and stratagems to divert him from his holy undertaking, and to bring him back into the world. And for this end he strongly represented to his

(a) Ps. cxxiv. 1.

imagination the riches and possessions which he had quitted, the nobility of his family, the glory, the advantages, and pleasures of a worldly life; and, on the other hand, the extreme difficulties and labours to be undergone in this way which he had chosen, the weakness of his body, unfit for such extraordinary fatigues, the long time he might have to live under this insupportable burden, &c. Suggesting, withal, that it was a crime in him to have abandoned, in the manner he did, his little sister, whom he was obliged to have taken care of. By these and suchlike representations, he strove to induce him, after he had put his hand to the plough, to look back, and to return to the world; but the saint overcame all his temptations by a lively faith and confidence in Christ crucified, and by continual and fervent prayer. Wherefore the enemy changed his batteries, and assaulted him in a most violent manner, night and day, sleeping and waking, with carnal suggestions and allurements to lust. But the holy young man, armed with divine grace, which he procured by earnest prayer and mortification, conquered all these temptations. It was in consequence of this victory that the unclean spirit one day appeared to the saint in a most ugly and filthy shape, bitterly weeping and lamenting, that after having deceived and seduced so many, he had been overcome by him. On being asked who he was, he answered he was the spirit of impurity, who made it his business to wage a continual war against youth, in which he was commonly successful, and that it was he that had so often attacked him, but had always been repulsed. Upon this the saint, giving thanks to God, was animated with a new courage against this detestable spirit, and began to sing aloud those

words of the Psalmist: "The Lord is my help, and I will despise my enemies."(a)

Satan, however, did not so soon desist from his efforts. Seeing that the young man, instead of relaxing, was daily advancing ever more and more in holiness, and fearing lest he should draw many by his example into the desert, to the prejudice of his usurped empire, he resolved to assail him with still greater violence. Gathering together his infernal spirits, they attacked him one night with the utmost fury, inflicting upon him many stripes, grievous wounds, and torments, till they left him stretched out like one dead, without either speech or motion. In this condition his friend, who used to visit him, found him the next morning, and carried him back to the village on his shoulders, where a great multitude of his kindred and neighbours assembled to perform his funeral obsequies. When, towards midnight, coming to himself, like one awakening from a deep sleep, and looking about him, he perceived his friend watching by him, and made a sign to him to carry him back again to his solitude without awaking any of the company. He did so, and Anthony being now alone, but not as yet able to support himself on his feet, by reason of his late treatment, performed his devotions as well as he could lying prostrate on the floor. At the end of his prayer, lifting up his voice in defiance to the spirits of darkness, he cried out with a lively faith and confidence in his God: "Lo, here am I, here is Anthony, ready to encounter you all; I shall not run away; do your worst, none of you shall be able to separate me from the love of Christ." Then he

(a) Ps. cxvii. 7.

began to sing, with the Psalmist, "If whole armies should stand together against me, my heart shall not fear."(a) The enemy, not enduring to be thus outbraved, re-assembled his hellish fiends, and returned to the charge with greater violence than before; and raising a sudden violent tempest, which shook the very foundations of the place, he laid it open on all sides, and entering in with all his wicked ones, in the shape of wild beasts and serpents of sundry kinds, he not only sought to terrify the saint with hideous yelling, roaring, howling, hissing, &c., but also made him feel their fury in a most sensible manner by the fresh wounds they inflicted upon him. But his courage and constancy were proof against all their attempts; so that notwithstanding the excessive pains he felt in his wounded body, he scorned them for all their vain efforts, reproached them with their weakness and cowardice, and mocked them for those beastly forms to which they were now reduced, who had formerly proudly aspired to be like unto God. At length Jesus Christ was pleased to come, in a visible manner, to the assistance of his servant, in the midst of this conflict; for, lifting up his eyes, he saw the top of the place open, and a bright ray of divine light entering in, which instantly dispersed those infernal spirits, and released him from all his pains. The saint, understanding that his Lord was present, thus addressed him: "Where wast Thou, my good Jesus, all the while? Where wast Thou? Why didst Thou not come before, to heal my wounds?" The Lord answered: "I was here, Anthony; but I waited to see thy combat; and now, because thou hast fought so bravely,

(a) Ps. xxvi. 3.

and not yielded, I will always assist thee, and make thy name famous over the whole earth." Anthony having heard these words, raised himself up to pray, and found that our Lord had now given him greater strength than he had before.

That great champion and defender of the Christian faith, the glorious St. Athanasius, who has transmitted to us the records of the battle which St. Anthony fought with the devil, thus concludes: "It is, indeed, a matter of wonder, that in so vast a wilderness one man alone should have stood his ground so long without either apprehending the daily encounters he met with from wicked spirits, or yielding to the fury of so many wild beasts and serpents as swarm in those deserts. But it was with good reason that David sung, 'They that trust in the Lord shall be as Mount Sion, they shall not be moved for ever.'[a] For so Anthony, by keeping his mind firm, quiet, and immoveable in God, put all the devils to flight, and had even 'the beasts of the earth at peace with him.'"[b]

[a] Ps. cxxiv. [b] Job v. 23.

TWENTY-SECOND DAY.

"If any of you want wisdom, let him ask of God, who giveth to all men abundantly, and upbraideth not; and it shall be given him. But let him ask in faith, nothing wavering. For he that wavereth is like a wave of the sea, which is moved and carried about by the wind. Therefore let not that man think that he shall receive anything of the Lord." (a)—*The Apostle St. James.*

"God will grant all that thou askest for in prayer, provided it be expedient; if it be not expedient, He will bestow something more conducive to thy welfare. He best knows how and when to satisfy thy wants. When, through ignorance, thou askest for what is not beneficial, it is better thy petition should not be granted."—*Venerable Blosius.*

The promise of our Saviour is a sufficient reason why we ought to have a firm confidence in our prayers; for He has engaged his word, that whatever we shall ask His Father, in His name, it shall be granted to us. "Amen, I say to you, whatsoever you shall ask from my Father in my name, it shall be granted you." Let us, then, approach to God with a filial confidence, for "No one ever hoped in the Lord and was confounded." Though we ought to be, indeed, filled with confusion when we think of our own unworthiness, yet the consideration of the goodness of God, of the promise of our Saviour, and of the merits of His sacred passion and death, ought to inspire us with the greatest confidence, and fill us with the liveliest hope.

(a) James i. 5, 6, 7.

This confidence that we shall attain the object of our petitions, through the infinite mercy and goodness of God, is absolutely necessary for the good success of our prayers. This is clearly proved by the doctrine of Christ, who, when exhorting us to pray, urges us to do it with confidence, saying, "All things whatsoever you shall ask in prayer, believing, you shall receive."(a) "All things whatsoever you ask when you pray, believe that you shall receive, and they will come unto you."(b) Hence the Apostle St. James compares those persons who pray without confidence to the waves of the sea, which are always agitated; and expressly declares, that such persons will never obtain the object of their petition. St. Augustine says, that "when confidence fails, prayer loses its value."—*Si fides deficit, oratio perit.*

The confidence with which we ought to perform our prayers is not founded upon our own justice or merit, but simply on the mercy and goodness of God, through the merits of His beloved Son, our Redeemer, Jesus Christ, who has promised to grant our petitions. We must, therefore, take care not to allow our confidence to be diminished on account of our sins and imperfections, however great they may be. But the more weak and sinful we feel ourselves in the presence of God, the more ought we to approach with firm confidence to the throne of His mercy, beseeching Him to look down upon us with eyes of pity, and deliver us from our miseries.

If we find it difficult to apply with confidence to

(a) Matt. xxi. 22. (b) Mark xi. 24.

God in our prayers, let us turn to our sweetest Mother the Blessed Virgin Mary, and earnestly beseech her to intercede in our behalf before the throne of her Divine Son.

"God's Virgin Mother," writes the venerable Blosius, "Mary, ever blessed, is mild, benignant, serene, sweet, and attractive, not only to the just and perfect, but also to the wretched and forlorn sinner; he no sooner invokes her aid than she hasteneth to inspire him with hope of a speedy reconciliation to his offended Judge, her own Divine and Merciful Son.

"If, with humble confidence and love, thou invokest her aid, be assured that her Divine Son will not refuse a Mother's prayer, and will remove the obstacles which oppose thy entrance into the kingdom of heaven. Considering her as the parent of a crucified God, Mary may assuredly be greeted by poor sinners as a well-spring of compassion, a fount of mercy, and the gate of Paradise."

Let us ever remember that it has never been heard that a truly devout client of Mary has been lost. The infernal enemy has not power enough to drag him to perdition whom this good mother keeps like a dear child under the mantle of her protection. Can it be that Jesus will not listen to those who are devout to His beloved Mother, when she forms so especially the joy of His heart? Could it be that Jesus would not behold, with looks of particular favour, those souls who employ their lives in loving, honouring, and glorifying this dear Mother, who is the sweetest object of His complacency? Could it be that Jesus would suffer those to fall a prey to the infernal enemy who are devout to Her, who, by giving Him birth,

has crushed the serpent's head and triumphed over his pride?

Be then, from your heart, devout to most Holy Mary, and consider yourself most happy to live under her patronage. Be not afraid that you can go too far in love and respect towards her; for how shall we love and respect her too much who has been raised by God Himself to the sublime dignity of being His mother? And with whom does the tribute of honour and glory which we pay to Mary terminate? Does it not terminate in God himself, who is wonderful in His saints, and has deigned to bestow on His mother all those excellent gifts and prerogatives which we reverence in her? Do we not praise the liberality, the greatness, and the loveliness of God Himself when we honour Mary for the wonderful graces with which He has vouchsafed to enrich her? Ah! let us remember that we were confided to Mary's care, to be her sons, by God Himself, when, on the Cross, He commended her, as our mother, to St. John; and that, therefore, He would have us honour, respect, and love her, as devoted children.

Let us remember the words of St. Bernard, that Jesus Christ so loved His mother, that He has made her the channel of His graces, so that every heavenly gift passes through her hands.

Let us, lastly, remember that all the saints were full of affection and tenderness for this dear mother, which caused them to instil her devotion and love into all hearts. "Dear children, love holy Mary, love holy Mary," was the lesson which St. Philip Neri continually impressed upon the young. Oh! what benefit our souls would reap if they were but sincerely devoted to Mary, the mother of

fair love and sweet hope! Ah! well may they feel certain of their salvation who give themselves entirely to glorify this great Mother, most especially by the imitation of her virtues and the purity of their manners. *Qui elucidant me, vitam æternam habebunt.*

TWENTY-THIRD DAY.

"Let us try to conceive a great distrust of ourselves, and become deeply impressed with this truth, that of ourselves we are good for nothing, except to spoil the designs of God. This conviction will render us His dependents, and induce us to have recourse to Him unceasingly for help."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

"Though a soul may arrive at such a degree as to induce our Lord to bestow many favours upon her in prayer, yet she must not place any confidence in herself, since she may fall: nor must she on any account expose herself to occasions of sin. Let her consider this well; for the deceit which the devil may employ afterwards is very great, and though the favours received might most certainly be from God, yet the traitor will not fail to take advantage of these favours in whatever way he can, especially against persons who are not strong in virtue, nor entirely disengaged from the world."—*St. Teresa.*

This saint had known several persons so eminent for virtue, that they had even reached the prayer of union; and yet afterwards were gained over by Satan: this was owing to their excessive self-confidence.

Father Scupoli, in his Spiritual Combat, speaks in the strongest terms of the necessity of self-distrust in order to make progress in the spiritual life. "Diffidence of ourselves," says he, "is so absolutely requisite in the spiritual combat, that

without this virtue we must not expect to defeat the slightest passion, much less to gain a complete victory. This important truth ought to be deeply imprinted in our breasts; for though we are in ourselves a mere nothing, we are too apt to entertain a conceit of our abilities, and falsely conclude that we are something. This vice springs from the corruption of our nature; but the more natural, the more difficult to be discovered. God, however, to whom nothing is hid, looks upon such thoughts with horror; because it is His will that we should be convinced we have neither virtue nor grace but what comes from Him alone, and that without Him we are incapable of one meritorious thought."

St. Philip Neri used to say that it was a most useful thing to repeat often and from the heart, "Lord, do not put any confidence in me, for I am sure to fall if Thou dost not help me;" or, "Oh, my Lord, look for nothing but evil from me."

St. Francis of Sales thus speaks of diffidence of ourselves and confidence in God: "These two things are like the scales of a balance; the elevation of the one is necessarily connected with the depression of the other; the more we have of diffidence in ourselves, the greater is our confidence in God; the less we possess of confidence in God, the more presumptuous shall we be of our own powers; but if we have no sort of confidence in our own strength, we may be assured that our hopes centre completely in God."

This saint also shows that diffidence of ourselves, far from weakening the soul, makes it stronger and more generous in the pursuit of virtue. "True distrust of ourselves," says he, "which is a fundamental virtue in the Christian life, is a disposition of an active and courageous nature. It enables us

to say, with the apostle, 'It is not I who act, but the grace of God which is in me.' Without this necessary virtue I can do nothing, not even entertain a good thought; with it I can do everything, because that which is impossible to man is very easy to God, who can do whatever He pleases, without the possibility of experiencing any resistance. Jesus Christ exhorted us to this confidence when He said, 'Have confidence in Me, for I have overcome the world;' and David said, before Him, 'Those who confide in the Lord are like Mount Sion, immovable.'"

Diffidence of ourselves, so necessary in the spiritual combat, requires, first, an interior sentiment of our own nothingness, so as to feel that of ourselves we are utterly incapable to take the least step, to perform the smallest action, to conceive the slightest thought, which may aid us in gaining eternal life. This, our incapability of doing anything towards advancing in virtue, and deserving eternal glory, is one of the fundamental truths of Christianity; for, as the Apostle St. Paul says, "We are not sufficient to think anything of ourselves, as of ourselves, but our sufficiency is from God." And in another place he says, "If any man think himself to be something, whereas he is nothing, he deceives himself."—Secondly, a deep sentiment of our own sinfulness, so as to feel that, of ourselves, not only are we incapable of doing the least good towards gaining eternal life, but we are also capable of doing any evil, and of committing every kind of sin. This is to be understood not only of great sinners, who spend their life in the total forgetfulness of God, and in the indulgence of their wicked passions, but of all men, without excepting those who have had the blessing

of living in innocence and practising all Christian virtues. For as long as we live in this corruptible body, however far we may have advanced in virtue, we always carry about us a great weight, which presses us down to the earth, and exposes us to the danger of losing the grace of God, and forfeiting our title to His eternal kingdom. The examples of Solomon, of David, and of Judas, who, after having been favoured by God with the choicest blessings, after having enjoyed His special friendship, fell shamefully into the most heinous sins, should be a warning to us not to take pride in ourselves, or rashly confide in our own strength: "Let him that thinketh himself to stand," says St. Paul, "take heed lest he fall."—Thirdly, to entertain a deep sentiment of our own unworthiness, so as to feel that we are utterly undeserving of divine graces, and that all the blessings which we receive from God are the pure effect of His boundless mercy and goodness towards us, without any merit on our part.

We may be greatly helped in attaining the necessary diffidence of ourselves by the following exercises, which are proposed to us by Father Scupoli. The first is, to consider attentively our own wretchedness, and that being in ourselves nothing, we are incapable of doing the least good, or advancing the least step towards heaven, without assistance from above. The second is, to beg of God, with great humility and fervour, this signal virtue, which must come from Him alone. Let us begin with acknowledging not only that we do not possess it, but that of ourselves we are utterly incapable of acquiring it.

Then let us cast ourselves at the feet of our Lord, and frequently importune Him to grant our

request, and this with a firm confidence of being heard, provided we wait with patience the effect of our prayer, and persevere in it with constancy.

The third is, to accustom ourselves by degrees to be diffident of our own strength, to dread the illusions of our own mind, and to fear the strong propensity of our nature to sin, and the terrible number of enemies which surround us, whose subtilty, experience, and force far surpass ours; enemies who can transform themselves into angels of light, and who lie continually in wait for us as we advance towards heaven.

The fourth is, that as often as we commit a fault, we enter into ourselves, in order to discover the excess of our own weakness; for God never permits us to fall but that we may see better into ourselves, that we may learn to despise such vile creatures as we are, and to desire sincerely to be despised by others; without this we must not hope to obtain a diffidence of ourselves, which is founded on humility and a conviction of our own wretchedness.

In effect, whoever proposes to approach the eternal Truth and Fountain of all light must doubtless know himself thoroughly, and not imitate the pride of those who gain no other knowledge than what their sins afford, and only then begin to open their eyes when they are plunged into some shameful and unforeseen disorder; which happens through God's permission, that they may know their own weakness, and by a fatal experiment learn to distrust their own strength. But God seldom applies so severe a remedy against presumption, but when more lenient admonitions have failed.

In a word, He permits persons to fall, more or

less, in proportion to their pride; and if there were ever any one as free from this vice as the blessed Virgin, I dare pronounce that such an one would never fall. As often, therefore, as you commit a fault, have immediate recourse to the knowledge of yourself; earnestly beseech our Lord to enlighten you, that you may see yourself as you are in His sight, and no more presume on your own strength; otherwise you will fall again into the same faults, or perhaps much greater, to the eternal ruin of your own soul.

TWENTY-FOURTH DAY.

"Cursed be the man that trusteth in man, and maketh flesh his arm." (a)—*The Prophet Jeremias.*

"We must not rely or calculate much upon human friendship or protection, because they are incompetent to support us. The Lord retires from those that trust in men."—*St. Vincent of Paul.*

THE governor of a town once asked this saint to help him at court in a certain affair, promising at the same time that he would assist his missionaries against their opponents. St. Vincent replied: "I will willingly serve you in what is just, but not to engage your help to our little congregation. I beg you to leave its members to God's care." This was his maxim, to owe nothing to the favour of men. Similar was the principle of the holy mother

(a) Jer. xvii. 1.

Jane de Chantal. Her brother, the Archbishop of Bourges, wrote to her that the queen of France, whom he had recently seen, wished to be recommended to her prayers. He also wished her to write a letter of congratulation on the queen's safe delivery, as her Majesty would be thereby gratified. But the saint declined, begging her brother, however, to tell the queen that all the nuns would pray for her Majesty's welfare. To her religious the saint excused herself by saying, that it was better to be humble and retired, and not over-anxious to secure the affection of great personages. It was well to pray for their prosperity, and that, if needful, God would incline their benevolence towards them.

St. Teresa one day said: "Now I know clearly that the protection of men is not to be depended upon, because they are like so many dry reeds, which split under pressure. The only kind friend upon whom we can rely is Jesus Christ. When I lean upon Him, I find myself supported as if I could resist the whole world, were it arrayed against me."

"Trust not in thy own knowledge," says the "Imitation of Christ," "nor in the cunning of any man living, but rather in the grace of God, who helps the humble, and humbles those who presume of themselves. To refuse comfort from any created thing, is a sign of great purity and interior confidence. He that seeks no outward testimony for himself, shows plainly that he has committed himself wholly to God."

It belongs to the children of this world to rely on the arm of flesh. But we who are the children of light must have a much higher aim; we must look with a noble contempt on the strength and greatness of men, and place our entire confidence in

the power, wisdom, and goodness of God. Such was the spirit which animated a glorious leader of God's chosen people—Judas Macchabeus. When this noble champion of God found that the impious Nicanor was coming with twenty thousand armed men to root out and destroy the whole nation of the Jews, calling together seven thousand that were with him, he exhorted them not to be reconciled to their enemies, nor to fear their multitude, but to fight manfully. Reminding them how they had unjustly injured the holy place, and also shamefully abused the city, besides destroying the ordinances of the fathers, he added: "They trust in their weapons, and in their boldness: but we trust in the Almighty Lord, who at a beck can utterly destroy both them that come against us, and the whole world." (a) In imitation of these valiant servants of God, let us look with a noble disdain on the favour and protection of men, being mindful of those words of the Holy Ghost: "All flesh is grass, and all the glory thereof as the flower of the field." (b) Let us rather place all our confidence in God, whose glory and almighty power endure for ever.

(a) 2 Mac. viii. 16, 17, 18. (b) Is. xl. 6.

TWENTY-FIFTH DAY.

"A Christian's soul's confidence consists in that perfect reliance on God which is independent of human prudence. O how great is the happiness of those who walk in perfect dependence on Providence and the divine protection."—*St. Jane Frances of Chantal.*

"Let us throw ourselves into the arms of God, and be sure that if He wishes to accomplish anything by us, He will qualify us for all He desires us to do for Him. When the soul lies resignedly in the hands of God, and is contented with the divine pleasure, she is in good hands, and has the best security that good will happen to her. Entire conformity and resignation to the divine will is truly a road on which we cannot get wrong, and it is the only road which leads us to taste and enjoy that peace which sensual and earthly men know nothing of."—*St. Philip Neri.*

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque thus addresses a devout person, who was labouring under grievous trials: "Have a great confidence in God, for His mercy infinitely surpasses all our miseries; often throw yourself into His arms, and on His divine heart, with a ready will to do whatever He wishes. Do not be discouraged by troubles or dryness, but suffer these and other trials, against which your inclination rebels, in the spirit of patience." To another she writes as follows:—"Often throw yourself, my dear sister, into the arms of the loving providence of Jesus, especially after holy communion, when He opens his heart to gain yours. Abandon yourself totally; give yourself up in everything to the power of His love. Whoever speaks of pure love, speaks of pure suffering. We ought to cherish our trials, and unite ourselves to the designs which God has for us. Let us repeat in all our troubles: '*Dominus*

illuminatio mea et salus mea quem timebo?' Treat with our Lord with an entire confidence in simplicity, and do not amuse yourself with reflecting upon your faults,—that serves only to satisfy self-love and to discourage: when we have done wrong, we must humble ourselves before God, entreating His pardon, and then, as says our holy founder, we must set to work again with fresh courage. Forget your own interest, and throw the care of yourself into the arms of your heavenly Father." To another, who suffered from great interior troubles:—"I pray the sacred heart of Jesus Christ, if it is not His good pleasure to make the tempest cease within you, to be Himself your support and your strength, that you may be firm, and even tranquil in the midst of the storm. This storm should not trouble you, for it will never overthrow you. The heart of Jesus is a good pilot: keep yourself constantly attached to Him by a loving confidence and a great humility, though you seem only to hold on to Him by an ideal point, as it were, without any enjoyment of feeling. Let your enemy cry out; it is a good sign when he makes so much noise; it is a proof that he has not his reckoning. Renounce all his suggestions by a simple disavowal, without tormenting yourself to produce with effort sensible acts. The sacred heart of Jesus well knows what passes within yours; it is He who permits all these trials, to teach you to abandon yourself to Him, and to all His designs upon your soul; hope in his goodness, that according to the increase of your troubles, your confidence may redouble. Regard yourself as a tree planted by the water-side, which bears its fruit in season; the more the tree is beaten by the wind, the more deeply does it bury its roots

in the earth: in like manner, the more you are assaulted by temptations, the more deeply should you bury your roots by a profound humility in the heart, and according to the heart of Jesus Christ. I supplicate Him to surround you by His power as with a wall impenetrable to all your enemies."

The venerable Da Ponte was so firmly established in the confidence in God, that all events were received by him with equal imperturbability, in a constant act of conformity to the divine will. His favourite ejaculation was, "May Thy most holy will, O Lord, now and for ever be accomplished in me, by me, with me, around me, and in all that belongs to me, and in all other creatures." A benedictine monk, a very worthy man, and a great friend of Father Da Ponte, once visiting him when he was ill, said, in a tone of compassion, "How strange it is, how strange, that God who has health to spare for ill-disposed people, who only misemploy it, does not bestow a little of it on your reverence, who would make such good use of it." The sick man gravely answered: "My dear father, let us leave God to rule the world as He sees best." The same religious, on another occasion, said he had asked a particular favour of God for him; he replied: "What I have most need of is, that the will of God be accomplished in me." Hearing one of his penitents, a lady of great virtue, express the fear she felt of dying amidst the terrible sufferings which from time to time afflicted her, without being able to prepare herself as she could wish for her last passage, the venerable man merely answered: "As for me, I ask no other sort of death than that which God pleases; if I fulfil His will, I am content."

St. Francis of Sales gave the following instructions to his spiritual daughters, the Nuns of the Visitation. "The exercise of a continual abandonment of ourselves into the hands of God, with perfect simplicity and purity, eminently includes all the perfection of other exercises; and while God favours us with it we ought not to change it for another. St. Francis of Assisi, on sending his spiritual children on a journey, instead of furnishing money or any other provision, gave them this advice: 'Cast your care upon the Lord, and He will provide for you.' I repeat the same advice to you, my very dear daughters; cast, with an entire confidence, your hearts, your designs, your solicitudes, and your afflictions, upon the paternal bosom of your God, and He will conduct you and convey you to that happy abode destined for you by His love. Let us attend to our divine Saviour, and copy His example, who, like a most perfect Psalmist, sings the sublimest airs of love from the tree of his cross, and concludes them all in these words: 'Father, into thy hands I commend my spirit.' After we shall have pronounced this, my dearest daughters, what remains to be done but to expire, and die the death of love, by living no more to ourselves, but letting Jesus Christ live in us?"

He also used to say: "Abandonment to God is the virtue of virtues; it is the cream of charity, the odour of humility, the reward of patience, and the fruit of perseverance. Great is this virtue, and only worthy to be practised by the dearest children of God. 'Father,' said our sweet Saviour on the cross, 'into Thy hands I commend my spirit.'(a) It is true He meant to say that all was consum-

(a) Luke xxiii. 46.

mated, and that He had finished the work which the Father had given Him to do ;(a) but nevertheless, He also would say : ' If it is Thy will, that I remain still upon this cross to suffer yet more, I am content therewith ; I resign my spirit into Thy hands ; Thou canst do with it as it shall please Thee.' We ought to do the same on all occasions, whether it be that we suffer or that we enjoy some contentment ; thus allowing the divine will to lead us according to its good pleasure, without ever allowing ourselves to be ruled by our own particular will. Our Lord loves with an extremely tender love those who thus abandon themselves totally to His fatherly care, allowing themselves to be governed by His good Providence, without considering whether the effects of that Providence will be sweet or bitter to them ; being entirely assured that nothing can possibly be sent them from that fatherly heart which is not for their good and profit, provided they have put their whole confidence in Him, and say, with a good heart : ' My Father, I resign my spirit, my soul, my body, and all that I have, into thy hands, to do with them, in thy love, whatever shall please Thee.' "

(a) John xix. 30.

TWENTY-SIXTH DAY.

"My people shall sit in the beauty of peace and in the tabernacles of confidence." (a)—*The Prophet Isaias.*

"The more a person loves God, the more reason he has to hope in Him. This hope produces in the saints an unalterable peace, which they preserve even in adversity, because as they love God, and know how bountiful He is to those who love Him, they place all their confidence, and find all their repose in Him alone. Hence the Spouse in the Canticles swims in delights; for as she loved nothing but her dearly beloved, she leant on Him alone, and as she knew how well He repays those that love, she remained in peace and joy. (b) Thus the Wise Man had good reason to say that, receiving charity, he had received everything."—*St. Liguori.*

THE filial confidence which the just repose in God produces that peace of mind and that happiness of heart surpassing all understanding, of which the world knows not. The Prophet Isaias joins peace and confidence together; because, in reality, peace of mind is but a necessary effect of confidence, and he who confides in God fears nothing, nor troubles himself at whatever occurs, since he knows God is his protector. "I will repose and sleep in peace," says the Psalmist, "because Thou, O Lord, out of Thy singular goodness, hast confirmed me in hope." But the confidence we speak of affords us not only tranquillity, but also replenishes us with a holy joy. "The God of all hope," says the apostle, "fill you with all joy, and bless you with his peace in your belief, to the end you may increase in hope and in the strength of the Holy

(a) Is. xxxii. 18. (b) Cant. viii.

Ghost."(a) The firm belief we have, that God knows what is for our good better than we ourselves, exempts us from all those troubles and anxieties incident to those who view things with eyes of flesh and blood; and also affords us, even in the most unexpected accidents of life, entire contentment and satisfaction. And the more perfect this confidence is, the greater also will be the joy and tranquillity. Because the more we love God, and confide in Him, the more assured shall we be that all which comes from Him will turn to our profit and advantage, since nothing else can be expected from the goodness and tenderness of affection He always has for us. It is this that animated the saints; it is this that gave them such interior peace and confidence in their sufferings and trials, that they feared neither men nor devils, neither savage beasts, nor anything which could happen to them from creatures; for they were satisfied, that without the permission of God, there was no power to hurt them.

Once when St. Ignatius was sailing towards Rome, there arose a tempest so violent that it carried away the mast and rent all the tackling of the vessel. Those who were on board were in great consternation, and imagining their last hour was come, expected nothing but death. In this extremity, and amidst the terror which the approach of death causes, the saint was not the least apprehensive or fearful. The only trouble he had was, that he had not served God as he ought to have done; as to anything else, he was at perfect ease, knowing that the winds and seas obey the Lord, and that the tempest arises not but by

(a) Rom. xv. 13.

His command, and the waves swallow not any but by His permission.

Thaulerus relates that there was an eminent theologian who, for the space of eight years, had besought Almighty God to enable him to meet with a person who might teach him the way of truth, and that at last, as he was one day repeating his request with greater fervour than ever, he heard a voice from heaven, saying: "Go to the church, and there thou shalt find him." He went, and saw on the outer step of the church a poor beggar covered with rags and full of sores. Pitying his sad condition, the theologian saluted him kindly, saying, "God give you a good day, brother." "I never had a bad one," replied the poor man, with a cheerful countenance. "Well, then, God give you good fortune," added the theologian. "I never yet experienced any misfortune," answered the man. "But how can you say," rejoined the theologian, "that you never had any bad days or misfortunes, since you are labouring under such distress and so many painful diseases?" "I will tell you," replied the poor beggar. "I have placed myself wholly into the hands of God, so that whatever He wills, I will it too. Hence, whenever hunger and thirst, cold and heat, or diseases, come upon me, I at once apply myself to praise God. Be the atmosphere serene or stormy, I bless God; be it prosperity or adversity, enjoyment or sufferings, that befalls me, I receive all most cheerfully and thankfully from the hands of God, well knowing that, coming as it all does from a source from which nothing but good can proceed, it must be the very best thing for me." "But," said then the theologian, "what if God should wish to send you into Hell?" "In an instant would

I throw myself into it," eagerly replied the poor man. "Yet see," added he, "I have two arms; humility, whereby I keep myself constantly united with His most sacred humanity; and love, whereby I cling to His divinity; and, should He condemn me to Hell, I would with these two arms cling so closely to Him, that He would be obliged to go along with me, and in His company I should not mind even remaining in Hell." "But who are you?" inquired the theologian. "A king," answered the stranger. "And where is your kingdom?" said the theologian again. "Within my own soul," was the reply; "for such command have I over my soul, that all her powers and inclinations are perfectly subject to my will." "Tell me, good man," asked the theologian, "how did you obtain such perfection?" "By recollection," answered the beggar, "by meditation, and by union with God. I could never find rest in anything that was less than God. I could not rest until I found *Him*, and thus I always enjoy peace." "And where," inquired the theologian, lastly, "where did you find God?" "I found Him," said the stranger, "where I left the love of all creatures."

TWENTY-SEVENTH DAY.

"In peace in the self-same I will sleep and I will rest. For Thou, O Lord, singularly hast settled me in hope." (a)—*Holy David.*

"Peace I leave with you, my peace I give unto you: not as the world giveth, do I give unto you. Let not your heart be troubled, nor let it be afraid." (b)—*Our Blessed Saviour.*

The peace of God which our blessed Saviour has left as a most precious inheritance to His disciples is enjoyed especially by those who place an entire confidence in God, and fully abandon themselves into the hands of His Providence. St. Francis of Sales, on being asked with what a soul must interiorly occupy herself who is entirely abandoned into the hands of God, answered thus: "She has only to abide in peace near our Lord, without disquieting herself as to what will become of her; for our Lord, to whom she has abandoned herself, will take enough thought for that. I do not, however, mean to say that we must not think about the things to which we are obliged to attend, each according to his office. No; for it would not do that a superior, for example, under the pretext of abandoning himself to God, and reposing himself on Him, should neglect to study and to learn the instructions proper to Him in the exercise of his office. It is very true that we must have great confidence thus to abandon ourselves without reserve to Divine Providence; but also, when we do entirely abandon ourselves, our Lord takes care of every-

(a) Ps. iv. 9, 10. (b) John xiv. 27.

thing and conducts everything; but if we reserve to ourselves anything about which we have not confidence in Him, He leaves us, as though He said, 'You think yourself wise enough to manage this affair without me; I allow you to guide it; you shall see what will come of it in the end.' St. Magdalene, who was entirely abandoned to our Lord, remained at His feet, and listened to Him as long as He spoke, and when He ceased to speak she also ceased to hear, but she stirred not from His side; so does the soul abandoned to our Lord abide within His arms, like an infant in its mother's bosom, who, when she puts him down to walk, walks till his mother again takes him up, and when she would carry him he suffers her to do so. He knows not, and thinks not, whither he is going; but suffers himself to be carried or taken wherever his mother pleases. Just in the same manner does this soul, loving the will and good pleasure of God in all that happens to her, suffer herself to be carried, and nevertheless walks, doing, with great care, whatever belongs to the expressed will of God."

"A devout soul," says venerable Blosius; "that aspires to be called the faithful handmaid and chaste spouse of Christ, rests not on any divine gift, but in the giver. Whether interior comfort be imparted or denied, the soul remains tranquil and resigned. She joyfully and faithfully reveres, and constantly loves her divine Spouse. Banish from your mind," says he, "whatever may tend to elevate, depress, or discompose it; endeavour, with great mildness, to acquire or preserve its peace; for Jesus Christ hath said: 'Blessed are the peaceable; learn of me, for I am meek and humble of heart.' Doubt not that God will crown your

labour, and make your soul a dwelling of delight. All he asks of you is, that as often as the emotions of your senses and passions molest you, you would speedily endeavour to disperse the clouds, to calm and appease the storms, and make peace once more smile on all your actions. As a house cannot be built at once, so this acquisition of interior treasure is not to be made in an instant. But the perfection of this work depends essentially on two things; the one is, that the hand of God Himself prepare His habitation in you; the other, that humility be the foundation of the building."

St. Ignatius of Loyola was so firmly established in peace, that no adverse accident, not even the extermination of his Society, would have robbed him of this inestimable treasure.

The venerable Father Da Ponte was animated by the same spirit. In the many heavy trials which befell his society, he never lost his peace of heart or serenity of countenance. He used to say: "These are all dispensations of God, which we must obey and submit to. Nothing of this happens but by His will." In these cases, however, his humility led him to think that the afflictions of his order were the chastisements of his own sins; hence he prolonged his prayers, increased his fasts, redoubled his penances, in order to appease the divine justice, irritated, as he said, by his sins.

The blessed Leonard used to say that four foundations are especially necessary to obtain peace of mind and heart. The first is, to be dead to the world, to creatures, to oneself, and to all that is not God, keeping the heart free from earthly things, so that all that does not pertain to God be esteemed as less than a grain of sand. The second is, so to live that all the occurrences of the day,

important or trivial, propitious or adverse, may always be attributed to the disposal of Divine Providence, and be considered as the best, most just for His glory and for our eternal salvation. The third, to love suffering, whether of body or mind, rejoicing in the contradictions and contempt of men. The paradise of heaven is full of joy, the paradise of earth is full of suffering. "Let us look," said he, "to Jesus, who had for His companions sorrow, contempt, suffering, and poverty." The fourth is, not to take many duties upon ourselves, even in doing good, and not to act rashly nor inconsiderately, but with calmness and discretion, being modest in every word and deed.

TWENTY-EIGHTH DAY.

"The peace of God, which surpasseth all understanding, keep your hearts and minds in Christ Jesus." (a)—*The Apostle St. Paul.*

"Our Lord, who is the God of peace, loves to converse familiarly with souls that are peaceful: *His place is in peace.*"—*Blessed Paul of the Cross.*

This holy man was most particular in recommending peace of heart, especially to persons of prayer. "Come, my child," he writes to one of his penitents, "be at rest in the most loving heart of Jesus; do not lose peace if the whole world should be destroyed." "One of the best marks," he writes to the same, "of your being in a good way, is to be

(a) Phil. iv. 7.

tranquil in the assaults and contradictions of creatures; be strong in this, and laugh at all attempts of hell. Endeavour, more than ever, to show your fidelity to His divine majesty by resting on the cross with great equanimity of mind, trying with all your power to be quiet, serene, and tranquil, without complaining; try to drink lovingly the chalice which Jesus Christ himself offers to you; for though it seems bitter to the flesh, it is sweet to the spirit. What I recommend to you is to keep your heart in peace without trouble; even if the world should be turned upside down, maintain your peace of heart. Nothing can separate us from God but sin; that we will not commit. *Vivat Jesus*, therefore; let us keep our hearts fixed on heaven."

In order to preserve peace of heart, he desired that his penitents should make no account of fears, useless reflections, and, above all, of scruples. He once thus wrote to a religious: "Experience will teach you that those vain fears of sin are real follies; they should be consumed in the fire of divine love." To another person he writes as follows: "Make a bundle of all your reflections, fears, and useless puerilities, and cast them into the furnace of the divine charity, where they will be immediately consumed; and do you continue interiorly recollected, reposing your soul in peace in the bosom of the great heavenly Father." To a nun he writes: "Be very careful to keep your heart always tranquil, for the devil fishes in troubled waters." "I perceive," he writes to another, "that the devil has raised a storm of scruples in your mind. If you practise obedience it cannot do you the least injury. God permits this trial that your soul may be more purified; and believe

me, the sufferings you feel render you more and more pure in the divine sight. It is a malicious suggestion of the devil that makes you think you sin in everything. It is not true. Humble yourself before the Lord, and then, sweetly reviving your faith, hide yourself entirely in God; fly to the uttermost depth of that sacred retreat of which I spoke, lose yourself entirely in that supreme Good, and let yourself be wholly consumed in that sacred furnace of love, and believe me that that divine fire will disperse the clouds and consume the dust of scruples, and your soul will become more and more pure, more and more beautiful in the eyes of your divine Spouse. In that sacred furnace you should remain in the silence of faith and love, like a victim offered in holocaust to the glory of God our supreme good, without reasoning in the least, or reflecting on these scruples, but constantly despising them, and reposing in peace in the divine bosom."

The devil once tried to disturb his peace of heart and shake his confidence by saying to him: "Unhappy man, thou hast taken upon thyself the sins of others; thou wilt be sorry for it at the judgment day." But the venerable father, calling to mind that Jesus Christ *est propitiato pro peccatis nostris*, went, with childlike simplicity, to the feet of his Lord, saying: "Behold, O my God, how I have loaded myself with the sins of others for Thy love, do Thou look to them, I unburden myself of them on Thee." Having thus placed his load upon the sacred shoulders of that loving Redeemer who bore with the wood of his cross the weight of all our sins, he was perfectly tranquillised, and persevered in the same affectionate and encouraging demeanour towards all who sought his aid.

When he was forsaken by any of his companions and disciples, it was natural that he should be somewhat pained, for it cost him much to direct and instruct them ; nevertheless, being fully persuaded that God Himself cultivated those chosen plants, which, like flowers growing on Calvary, and watered with the blood of our Blessed Redeemer, were to diffuse around the sweet odour of Jesus Christ, he was never agitated, never cast down at any desertion, but reposing all his care upon his Lord, with an act of confidence in Him, he exclaimed : " Every tree that the heavenly Father hath not planted shall be rooted up." " Few and good," he would say ; " God has no need of any one. I trust entirely in Him, the Congregation is His own work. It is for Him to look to its advancement." In all the troubles and difficulties he encountered, this was his only resource : raising his eyes to heaven, in an attitude of the deepest submission and confidence, he would say, " *The will of God.*" Then taking off his cap, and reverently bowing his head, he would add, " *fiat voluntas tua.*"

The venerable Mary Margaret Alacoque thus addresses an afflicted soul : " Believe me, my dear sister, that you must not allow yourself to fall into despondency under the little trial by which it pleases God to prove you. Conform yourself to His will, and abandon yourself entirely to Him. It is His desire that you should be peaceful and constant in your troubles and distresses, without disquieting your mind by seeking means to relieve your uneasiness as you have done. You must remain as you are, since it is the will of God. Of what use is it to torment yourself as you do ? Only take away whatever you know to be an

obstacle to His love. It is His will that you live in an entire deprivation of everything but Himself, of all that might satisfy your inclinations and bind your affections; for accordingly as you clothe yourself with these things, He will in the same measure despoil you of His graces."

The holy Abbot Sisois being asked which was the best way to obtain peace and rest for the soul, he replied: "Be contemptible in your eyes, cast pleasures behind your back, be free from all earthly cares, and you shall assuredly find rest."

Another holy man gives the following directions for attaining this end: "Pray incessantly that God would grant you compunction and humility; think always on your own sins, and do not presume to judge others; be subject and obedient to all; restrain your tongue, and your sensual appetite; contend with no man, contradict no one, and your mind shall be at peace."

TWENTY-NINTH DAY.

"Inquietude is the greatest evil, sin excepted, that can befall the soul. For, as seditions and evil commotions lay waste a kingdom within, and render it incapable of resisting its enemies from without, so our heart, when uneasy and disturbed, has no power either to preserve the virtues which it has acquired, or to resist the temptations of the enemy, whose great aim is to fish in troubled waters. Inquietude proceeds from an inordinate desire to be delivered from evil, or to acquire good; and yet nothing is more calculated to increase the one and prevent the other, than this very inquietude. Those souls that allow themselves to be disquieted for the sake of good, are as birds in a net, which, by fluttering and beating about violently, instead of releasing, entangle themselves the more completely in its fatal meshes. When, then, your heart is taken with a desire to be freed from some evil, or to acquire some good, above all things be calm, tranquillize your mind and your heart, and then, following the bent of your desire, calmly and orderly adopt such means as may be best suited to your purpose. But when I say calmly, I do not mean negligently or indifferently, but without eagerness and disturbance; otherwise, far from succeeding, you will ruin all, and will only more and more entangle yourself."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

"When thou art molested, or overpowered, by the weight of adverse fortune, or struck down by the persecution of wicked and malignant men,—if to these crosses, wrongs, and trials, be added perplexities, sadness, and obscurity of mind, with pain, sickness, and indisposition of body, still, keep thy soul in patient hope, which thy heavenly Father, who knoweth how to make evil subservient to good, will not suffer to be confounded."—*Venerable Blosius.*

THE saints are most particular in urging upon pious souls the necessity of avoiding as much as possible whatever is calculated to disquiet their minds and disturb their hearts.

"Rid thyself," writes the venerable Blosius, "of pusillanimity, scrupulosity, and perplexity of conscience; for if suffered to take root they stifle, in

various ways, the energy of the soul, and obstruct not a little her advance in the path of virtue. With unshaken faith believe that the solicitude of the Lord thy God for thee is greater than thy own. Wherefore, unhesitatingly and unreservedly, confide thy interests to His providence, and into the abyss of His wisdom throw all thy misgivings, doubts, and cares." "My soul," says holy David, "is always in my hands, O Lord, and I have not forgotten Thy law."(a) Upon these words St. Francis of Sales thus comments: "Devout soul, frequently examine, at least morning and night, whether you have your soul always in your hands, or whether some passion or disturbance of mind has not taken it out of your hands. Consider whether you have your heart at command, or whether it has escaped you, to give itself to some inordinate affection of love, hatred, envy, avarice, fear, sadness, or joy; and if it has thus gone astray, seek it without delay, and calmly bring it back into the presence of God, subjecting all its affections and all its desires to the guidance of His holy will. As those who are afraid of losing something very precious hold it fast in their hands; so, in imitation of this great king, ought we ever to say, 'O my God, being in danger of losing my soul, I carry it always in my hands, and thus forget not Thy law.' Never allow slight desires to disquiet you, lest those that are stronger find you in trouble and disorder. When, then, you perceive any uneasiness within you, recommend yourself to God, and resolve to do nothing until you are restored to perfect tranquillity, unless it be in some matter of immediate urgency; but

(a) Ps. cxviii. 109.

even then make a peaceable effort to repress, or at least to moderate, the bent of your desire, and then do what reason, and not your desire, seems to require of you."

This saint justly blames those persons who give way to disquietude under the excuse of delivering themselves from evil. "If the soul," writes he, "seeks the means to be delivered from the evil which aggrieves her for the love of God, she seeks them with patience, meekness, humility, and tranquillity, looking for her deliverance much more from the good providence of God than from her own exertions, cares, and anxieties; but if self-love be the motive of her seeking consolation, she is eager and hurried, as if what she sought depended more on herself than God: I do not say that the soul thinks so, but she acts as though she thought so."

"Anguish, fears, and scruples," says the blessed Paul of the Cross, "will be consumed in the furnace of holy love; repose there, and if the Divine Spouse should cause you to slumber, sleep in peace, and do not awake without His permission. This divine slumber is an inheritance that the Divine Father grants to His beloved. In this slumber of faith and love the science of the saints is learned, and the bitter mouthfuls of adversity are quickly digested."

For many years this blessed father was plunged into a terrible darkness, in which he was constantly agitated by fears and doubts respecting the certainty of His salvation; but, faithful to God, he clung to Him all the more trustfully when he seemed most abandoned and forgotten by His mercy. His brethren, when they entered his room suddenly, often found him uttering, with profound

sighs, such words as these: "O Lord, do what Thou wilt with me, afflict me as Thou pleasest, provided Thou dost not remove Thyself from me for ever." At other times he exclaimed, with inexpressible ardour, "Thou fleest from me, O Lord, but wherever Thou goest, I go, and I will remain always where Thou art. Lord! let Thy Holy will be done in me. I will suffer whatever Thou pleasest; but I shall never cease to belong to Thee. Flee from me as Thou wilt, I shall always follow Thee."

Often did he repeat, that though he found himself in a sea of troubles, he could bear to have them increased tenfold without losing his confidence of being saved through the Passion of Jesus and the protection of Mary. Sometimes he said: "What will become of poor Paul? I am full of miseries; but I hope to be saved. I trust in the Passion of Christ; I trust, through the intercession of our Lady of Dolors, that I shall one day reach Paradise." And again, "I know how miserably ungrateful I have been to God, but yet I confide in His mercy, that He will receive me into His paternal bosom."

The same sentiments were expressed with great vivacity in his letters. "Dear Father Fulgenzio," he exclaimed, addressing one of his congregation, "terrible are the trials which I have to endure, yet, *etiamsi occiderit me in eo sperabo.* A shipwrecked mariner at the mercy of the ferocious waves may truly say, 'One thing alone is my comfort, that I should lift up my eyes to the Lord.'" Another time he thus wrote to a devout soul: "I see new combats preparing for me, and who knows how I may meet them. Clouds are gathering, darkness is increasing, terrors are awakening, devils are assaulting me with tempta-

tions and men with the malice of their tongues; within there is nothing but fighting, desolation, and weariness; not to mention other trials which are indescribable. Ah! how much more desirable is death than life. May it please Almighty God, that all this may open for me the road to a happy eternity. I know not how to endure myself; but I do not lose my belief, and trust that God will perfect His work in me."

St. Jane Frances of Chantal thus describes a most afflicting temptation which she endured on the vigil of the festival of the most adorable Trinity, and the manner in which she succeeded in overcoming it. "My soul was as in the pangs of death. I felt myself surrounded on all sides, and knew not how to escape; I was deprived in a moment of the cordial joy of my retreat, which had ever been a source of support to me in my other temptations; the column of constancy which had ever been my support crumbled into pieces; it seemed as if I saw my father and father-in-law, loaded with grief and years, crying for vengeance before God against me; and my children, also, were doing the same thing. It seemed as if I heard many voices remonstrating with me for having committed a great fault; and that which was yet more painful was, that I was censured with the words of holy writ, and condemned as an infidel, in the Church of God, for having deserted my children; and I was persuaded that I had certainly deceived the holy bishop, and that consequently the counsel he had given me to leave my relatives was contrary to the will of God." She suffered this martyrdom for above three hours. She was so pressed by this temptation, that she several times arose to consult her blessed Father

St. Francis, but the silence of the night retained her; and placing her hand, as a sign of fidelity, on the holy name of Jesus, which she had engraven on her heart, light returned to her mind, and throwing herself on her knees, she said to her enemy, "I cannot defeat thee with reason, for thou knowest not what it is;" then saying three times the "*Deus in adjutorium*," she made an act of perfect resignation of herself and everything belonging to her into the hands of God. "I remember very well," said she once, while speaking of this temptation, "that I was completely cured by uttering the following words: 'My God, look down with the eyes of Thy mercy on this nothing; I abandon myself for ever to Thy Providence; let my relations, my children, and myself perish, if such be thy will; what matters it to me? My whole and only good in time and in eternity is to obey Thee, and to serve Thy Majesty." With these words uttered from a sincere and loving heart, the blessed Mother not only returned to her former tranquillity, but felt a joy altogether new.

THIRTIETH DAY.

"Sometimes God dwells by His grace in a heart, where His presence is least felt; and not unfrequently a dryness of spirit is better for a Christian than abundant unction or sensible sweetness; for in aridity, a devout man feels how incapable he is of doing good, when left to himself."—*Venerable Blosius.*

"Sometimes our Lord wills that souls chosen for the service of His Divine Majesty should nourish themselves with a firm and inviolable resolution of persevering to follow Him in the midst of disgusts, drynesses, dislikes, and bitternesses of the spiritual life, without consolations, favours, tendernesses or sweetnesses, and that they should believe themselves worthy of nothing else; thus following the divine Saviour with the fine point of the Spirit, without anything to rest upon but His divine will, which so wills it. And in this way I desire that we should walk. For never shall we be reduced to such an extremity as not to be able to diffuse before the Divine Majesty the perfumes of a holy submission to His most holy will, and of a continual promise never to consent to offend Him."—*St. Francis of Sales.*

THIS saint used to say, "that the true manner of serving God consists in following Him, in walking after Him without any support of consolation, of feeling, or of light, but that of pure and naked faith." He never stayed to consider whether he enjoyed consolation, or was overtaken by desolation; when our Lord inspired him with pious sentiments, he received them with simplicity; if He did not visit him in that way, he supported the privation with patience. His method in prayer was to keep himself humble, little, and debased before God, with a singular respect and confidence.

The blessed Sebastian, taught by his own experience, thus encourages desolate souls under

aridity. "Often does aridity in prayer aid more than sweetness,—it being usually seen, that together with the latter, the love of virtue vanishes away; whereas, if a good resolution be made in aridity it abides. When the soul finds herself in such abandonment that she seems deprived of life, and knows not how to make one act of devotion, when she seems to have an intellect without light, and a will without ardour, let her, without distressing herself, make some good resolution, and, like the lily amid the thorns of those pains, gradually raise herself to God, and living in quietness and peace, confide in the divine mercy." He also strongly recommends persons troubled with distractions and temptations in time of prayer, after recollecting themselves, to proceed tranquilly without beginning anew; adding, that some persons, who continually begin their prayers over again, are always beginning and never finish them, and thus grow weary, and lose their fervour, and the will to recommend themselves to God.

St. Teresa also urges desolate souls never to despond, however painful their aridities may be. "If they should be unable," says she, "to have even one good thought, yet they must not trouble themselves. We are unprofitable servants, and what, therefore, can we fancy that we are able to do? Our Lord is better pleased that we should know this truth, and should consider ourselves only fit to be treated like poor asses who turn the wheel for drawing the water; for these, though they have their eyes blindfolded, and know not what they are doing, draw up more water than the gardener can with all his strength and exertions. We must walk in this way with liberty, and place

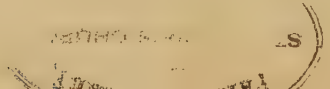
ourselves in the hands of God. If his Majesty shall be pleased to rank us among the number of His confidential friends, we must accept the honour with a good will; but if not, we must be content to serve in inferior employments, and not sit down in the best place. God takes more care of us than we do of ourselves, and knows what every one is fit for; what use, then, is it for him who has already given his whole will to God to govern himself?"

Of the venerable Labrè we read, that towards the end of his earthly pilgrimage he was visited with a most afflicting desolation. Deprived of all sensible devotion, he experienced great aridity in prayer, dulness of heart, darkness in the understanding, coldness in the affections of the will, perplexity regarding his eternal salvation, and an uncertainty whether he was pleasing God by his actions; hence he suffered in his interior great mental agitation and extreme anguish. It seemed to him that he was like the bark of the apostles, agitated by the waves of a storm which unexpectedly had arisen, and that our Lord was sleeping, as He did in the vessel of His beloved apostles. Still he was never discouraged, and when he had not the favourable wind of the Holy Spirit, he used the oars diligently to advance himself in his voyage. He made use of two means for this purpose; one exterior, the other interior. His exterior practice was, never to relax in his penances or prayers, but, on the contrary, to increase them; which must have been so much the more pleasing to God, as he was obliged to use greater force to overcome his repugnance. The interior exercise was to humble himself before God, confessing him-

self deserving of punishment and abandonment; and to conform himself to the divine will; and often repeat with the Priest Heli: "It is the Lord; let Him do what is good in His sight,"(a) and with Job, "As it hath pleased the Lord, so is it done; blessed be the name of the Lord."(b) Thus he succeeded in tranquillizing and composing his mind. What troubled him most in this aridity was, that he believed himself guilty, as if he had given Almighty God cause to treat him in this manner by his ingratitude for the graces and benefits with which God had favoured him, of which he accused himself in his confessions with sentiments of bitter grief and confusion. Still, in this affliction he humbled himself before God, he conformed himself to His holy will; he was never discouraged; he humbly acknowledged that he had done what might be expected from a sinner and a miserable wretch. Thus he overcame the storm, and gained greater merit before God; who, by such conduct, "gives also with temptation a happy issue," making use of the infernal enemies to promote the spiritual advancement of His beloved children.

Let souls under aridity comfort themselves by reflecting on the following sentences of the venerable Blosius: "We should unresistingly allow the Lord to operate in us what—where—and when He pleases. We should willingly submit to be drawn by Him, so to speak, through the shades of death and the darkness of hell. Is it not absurd to say in the Lord's Prayer so frequently: 'May His holy will be done,' and yet feel ourselves

(a) 1 Kings iii. 18. (b) Job i. 21.



disconcerted and inconsolable when it is accomplished?"

"It is possible for a man to feel so spiritually forsaken that God seems to say to him: 'Depart, I know thee not, but as an object of abhorrence.' Nevertheless, in this desolate state, a sinner should not abandon hope. Let him appeal to his Saviour's compassionate heart, and pray thus: 'O Lord! the pangs I endure are not unknown to Thee; they are not inflicted without a cause by Thy paternal hand. Confiding in Thy infinite benignity, I humbly and resignedly bow down under Thy just and merciful correction."

"In mental anxieties, when thy soul is enveloped in gloomy forebodings, and well-nigh overwhelmed with anguish and care, if thou makest an act of conformity to the divine will, thou art nearer to God than if thou felt thyself rapt in a delightful ecstacy above this earth."

A great means for finding comfort in time of disquietude is, that after invoking "The Father of mercies and the God of all comfort, who comforteth us in all our tribulation,"(*) we make known the trouble to our director, or to a prudent and pious friend. "If you can make known," writes St. Francis of Sales, "your disquietude to your director, or to a confidential and devout friend, you will immediately find relief; for the opening of a troubled and agitated heart consoles it as speedily as the opening of a vein relieves a sick man from the violence of fever, and it is the best of all remedies." "Yes," said the good king St. Louis to his son, "whenever thou hast any

(*) 2 Corinth. i. 3.

uneasiness in thy heart, disclose it as soon as possible to thy director, or to some good person; for the consolation which thou wilt receive will enable thee to bear thy trouble calmly."

Our Saviour gives us an example of this in the garden of Gethsemani, when, feeling himself overwhelmed with grief and sadness, He said to His beloved disciples: "My soul is sorrowful even unto death."(a)

(a) Matt. xxvi. 38.